THE AMBIVALENCE OF IDENTITY

IN M.G. VASSANJI'S

THE IN-BETWEEN WORLD OF VIKRAM LALL

Thesis submitted to the

Institute of Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English Language and Literature

by

Başak Melike Güven

Fatih University

November, 2010

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APPROVAL PAGE

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I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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This is to certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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AUTHOR DECLARATION

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

3. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has been comprised of: courses in English Literature, including literary theory, English, American, and World Literature in genres that include narrative literature, documents on history, newspaper and thematic courses such as the history of Utopia and Dystopia.

i) Research Methods. The thesis incorporates research methods taught on both the undergraduate and, on the graduate level (by thesis advisor) during the course of the study. See ii below.

ii) Sources examined in this thesis include articles from scholarly journals, other articles such as reviews, essays, and interviews with the authors in question; books on Post-Colonial Literature and Identity in general and M. G. Vassanji in particular; and secondary sources including postcolonial theory and sources from other disciplines i.e., economy, sociology, geography, anthropology, and history.

Başak Melike GÜVEN

November, 2010

ABSTRACT

Başak Melike GÜVEN **November, 2010**

THE AMBIVALENCE OF IDENTITY: IN M.G. VASSANJI'S

THE IN-BETWEEN WORLD OF VIKRAM LALL

M. G. Vassanji's 2003 Giller Prize winning novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, is narrated through the voice of a Kenyan-born Indian living through the country's struggle for independence and decolonisation, and the corruption and fear that ensue in the post-colonial period. This thesis explores the connections between post-colonial theory and Vassanji's novel; in particular it looks at Vassanji's depiction of the causes and effects of ambivalent identities amongst the various social groups in Kenya during the colonial and post-colonial periods, and also the decolonisation era.

The specific areas of postcolonial theory that underlie the analysis of this study are the concepts, and conceptualisations of, diaspora, hybridity, and ambivalence. The theory concerning the ambivalence of the colonised is the novel's central theme, as indicated by the title. The feeling of displacement in contrast to the desire of belonging that the protagonist of the novel suffers from the beginning of the novel until the end is the main subject of the thesis.

This ambivalence cannot however be separated from the effects of diaspora, the machinations of colonialism, nor the inevitable outcomes of decolonisation. Even though every citizen of Kenya lived through the same turbulent period of history, they ended up with different identities due to their differing positions in the complex social mosaic. The past haunts the present and future. For this reason, ambivalence is not restricted to Vikram Lall, but also to be observed in the novel's other characters.

The thesis also shows that Vassanji concurs with the theoretical stance which holds that the role of the postcolonial intellectual is to act as a dynamic figure in retrieving and elucidating the past for a better future.

Key words: Ambivalence, Identity, Diaspora, Displacement, M.G. Vassanji, post-colonial, decolonisation.

KISA ÖZET

Başak Melike GÜVEN **Kasım, 2010**

M. G. VASSANJI'NİN *THE IN-BETWEEN WORLD OF VIKRAM LALL* ADLI ROMANINDA KİŞİLİK ÇELİŞKİSİ

M.G.Vassanji'nin 2003 Giller ödüllü romanı *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* da ülkede yaşanan bağımsızlık ve sömürgeciliğe karşı koyma mücadelesi ve sömürge döneminin ardından baş gösteren yozlaşma ve korku aslen Hintli bir Kenyalının ağzından anlatılmıştır. Bu çalışma, post-koloniyel teori ve Vassanji'nin romanı arasındaki bağlantı, özellikle de Vassanji'nin sömürge, sömürge sonrası ve bağımsızlık dönemlerinde Kenya'daki değişik sosyal gruplarda çelişkiler yaşayan karakterlerin tasvirleri üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır.

Bu çalışmaya kaynaklık eden post-koloniyel teorinin belirli alanları diaspora, kültürel melezlik ve kimlik karmaşası konseptleridir. Koloni toplumlarındaki kimlik karmaşası başlığından da anlaşıldığı üzere bu romanın temel mesajını oluşturmaktadır. Romandaki özellikle ana karakterin ızdırabını çektiği aidiyet arzusuna karşın hissetttiği yerinden edilme duygusu bu çalışmanın ana konusudur.

Yaşanan bu kimlik karmaşası diasporanın sonuçlarından, sömürgeciliğin oyunlarından ve bağımsızlığın getirdiği kaçınılmaz sonuçlardan bağımsız incelenemez. Her Kenya vatandaşı tarihin bu çalkantılı anını yaşamış olmasına rağmen, her karakter karmaşık sosyal yapıdaki pozisyonları sebebiyle değişik kimliklere bürünmüşlerdir. Geçmişte yaşananlar hem bugünü hem de geleceği etkisi altına almaktadır. Bu yüzden kimlik karmaşası sadece Vikram Lall'a özgü bir durum olmaktan da öte romandaki tüm karakterlerde gözlenmektedir.

Bu çalışma aynı zamanda Vassanji'nin post-koloniyel aydınların amaçlarının geçmişte yaşananları unutturmayarak topluma daha iyi bir gelecek sağlamak olduğunu savunan teoriye katıldığını göstermektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: çelişki, kimlik, diaspora, M. G. Vasaanji, yerinde edilme, post-koloniyel, bağımsızlık.

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INTRODUCTION

M. G. Vassanji's 2003 Giller Prize winning novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, is narrated through the voice of a Kenyan-born Indian living through the country's struggle for independence and decolonisation, and the corruption and fear that ensue in the post-colonial period. This thesis explores the connections between post-colonial theory and Vassanji's novel, in particular it looks at Vassanji's depiction of the causes and effects of ambivalent identities amongst the various social groups in Kenya during the colonial and post-colonial periods, and also the decolonisation era.

In the novel, Vassanji deals with the themes of ambivalence, decolonisation, and Diaspora and can thus be read as a literary exploration of key post-colonial concerns. Adding further strength to this exploration is the fact that Vassanji himself was born in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1950, and brought up in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (Genetsch 23), the same place and period covered by the novel. So, although not presented as an autobiography, M.G. Vassanji nevertheless draws on his real life experiences in East Africa, where he spent his first years of childhood. Further, through his protagonist Vassanji suggests that story telling can act as a remedy for the painful results of colonialism; the novel begins with Vikram stating that he is telling his story not to "seek redemption through confession" or to serve any political aim, but instead to as part of a process of self-healing, a process that he suggests can help generate a healthier society and future: "if more of us told our stories to each other, where I come from, we would be a far happier and less nervous people" (3).

Ambivalent identities are at the centre of Vassanji's post-colonial novel. Characters from different racial, ethnic, cultural, social, and political backgrounds interact with each other in an "in-between" time and space. Vassanji, in reflecting the unfair, violent, oppressive and 'othering' ruling policy of colonialism, focuses on the ambivalence and in-betweenness of his characters. Gaining independence from the coloniser never brings about the much-dreamt-of utopia of the colonised; on the contrary, it often symbolises the beginning of a new problematic era. The personalities and relationships produced during the political and social atmosphere of colonisation and the upheaval of decolonisation are the vehicle in which Vassanji explores the post-colonial themes.

Many of the issues and assertions of post-colonial theory are played out in the novel. According to the theory, past experiences prevent the colonised from acting as a free agent. Their past haunts and ruins their present and future. Besides, the colonisers never truly leave the land but stay among the colonised as ghosts. The fight fuelled by the coloniser among the former colonised subjects after the pseudo-departure of the West is a grim reality during post-colonial times. These facts make corruption an unavoidable part of decolonisation. Vassanji investigates this process through his characters, in particular through making his protagonist part of the corrupt regime of the newly independent state.

The struggle of the colonised is not only to build an independent and modern country but also to reconstruct a sense of self, an identity other than that conferred by the colonisers. Vassanji, by depicting the ambivalent identities and power relations in a colonial and later postcolonial world, focuses on the hybridity that might enable and lead the colonised to a better understanding of their own identity. The

complicated and suffering nature of ambivalence is brought out by the protagonist – Vikram Lall's narration of his painful experiences in finding his true self and coming to terms with his past in a dynamic multicultural society. As a Kenyan-born Indian, Vikram's search for his place in a multi-polarised world provides an interesting example of the colonial/post-colonial situation that is much more complex simply a case of Black versus White. Vikram Lall is neither Black nor White, but rather 'Brown', but is nevertheless an important component of the social mosaic of post-colonial Kenya.

The thesis is divided into three main sections, which contribute both to the objective of the thesis as well as the background knowledge required to grasp the historical, social, and political setting and developments of colonial and postcolonial times.

The first chapter presents an overview of the various areas of postcolonial theory that relate to the central themes of the novel. The theory concerning the ambivalence of the colonised, the novel's central theme, as indicated by the title, is delineated. In addition, the role of the postcolonial intellectual, as a dynamic figure in retrieving and elucidating the past for a better future, is highlighted. From this perspective, the post-colonial theory and its relation to the literature is discussed.

The second chapter demonstrates the main causes of ambivalence and their effects on the society during the decolonisation of Kenya with references to the novel, history, and postcolonial theory. In this chapter, after grounding the argument that Vassanji's novel – or any other literary product – can be regarded as a representation of their time and history, the most important and effective factors that

shaped the worlds of the colonised people in Kenya during the process of decolonisation are studied. Being a member of the Asian Diaspora in Africa, the bloody independence struggle, and the political corruption during the post-colonial era are claimed as social, historical, and political reasons underlying the in-between worlds of the characters in the novel. First, the dilemma of simultaneously belonging to and being alienated from a society which the diasporic identities suffer is analysed. Second, some historical information about the Mau Mau rebellion, so styled by the colonists, is provided in order to connect the history both to the novel and to postcolonial theory. Finally, the political turmoil following the independence of Kenya and the emergence of a new class, the 'African petty bourgeoisie', is analysed. It is argued that the pseudo-departure of the colonials led the new nation to an infectious corruption. Vassanji focuses on this complex hybrid moment of political change and the resulting difficulties that stand in the way of constructing a new society and identity not to draw attention to the impossibility or the failure of transformations, but on the contrary, to draw attention to the productivity of this in-between space and time.

The third chapter of the thesis focuses on the term 'ambivalence'. It is defined in relation to the postcolonial theory and explained by providing examples from the novel. The ambivalence of identity is studied by analysing three major characters in the novel; Vikram Lall, his uncle Mahesh, and his African friend and childhood playmate Njoroge. The stories of these in-between people show the different experiences of 'the other' and challenge simplistic understandings of the colonised. That is to say, the common stereotype of the colonised being simply diametrically opposed to the coloniser, is questioned with Vassanji's three-dimensional character

portraits. The conflicts and relations of these three characters under the excessively unbalanced power structures of colonialism, and later in their quest for self and home during the decolonisation period, are depicted vividly by Vassanji to create an awareness and understanding of ambivalence. In the end, Vassanji believes that the recovery and rediscovery of the 'self' is only possible by coming to terms with one's colonial heritage and its ambivalences.

The concluding chapter, reviews the issues that have concerned postcolonial theorists and how these are reflected in Vassanji's novel.

CHAPTER I

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

POST-COLONIAL THEORY

Post-colonial theory is an ideal lens to perform a close reading of M.G. Vassanji's novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, as well as to understand the history of colonial and post-colonial Kenya and thereby analyse the issues of identity which are the central motifs in the novel. The critical techniques and directions developed by post-colonial theorists lighten our path in analysing and understanding colonialism and its effects.

Whilst colonialism was not the first violent or inhuman activity perpetrated by mankind on mankind, it has nevertheless taken the human's basic right for life, property, land, and freedom under the guise of a civilised purpose and discourse. The mission of the post-colonial intellectual is to reveal the past, and rewrite imperialist history, to revaluate it, to re-inscribe it. Arif Dirlik's facetious answer to the question: "When exactly does the post-colonial start?" highlights the importance of post-colonial intellectuals. His answer, based on a deliberate mis-reading of the initial question, was "When Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World academe" (52). In other words, it is the intellectuals who initiate the decolonisation inside and outside their world by breaking the silence of the colonised.

On the other hand, decolonisation has never been an easy process, the destruction brought about by long years of colonialism was so profound and all-embracing that any attempt to recover the lost past and the lost self of necessity

required as a very minimum an enormous level of awareness, patience, hard work and union. Colonialism was a stupendously vast and enduring project of the West, including people from all social levels and groups, missionaries, soldiers, judiciary, bureaucrats, diplomats, educators, the press, writers, poets and intellectuals. Hence, the anti-colonial movement necessitates involvement at every level of society and by every member of the colonised people, people whose only link was often merely shared oppression and tyranny, to erase the signs, significations and conditions imposed by colonialism, to rewrite the script of years. Colonisation utilises a system of 'divide and rule' by which it not only controls the land and the people but also, as Fanon mentions, takes away the past of the colonised and "distorts, disfigures and destroys" their history (2004: 149). The role of the intellectual does not end after creating the initial consciousness for independence; on the contrary it requires persistence as the process of decolonisation is, according to Peter Hulme, "a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome" (qtd. in Childs and Williams 66). In brief, post-colonial theory is, in part, an effort to retrieve and elucidate the past in order to enlighten the present and future.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, European colonies started to gain their independence from imperial governance. With the beginning of the decolonising period, the need to reveal and dismantle colonialist power is aroused. Although political independence may be achieved, the cultural, institutional, and economical forces of the colonialist power still persist. Post-colonial theory developed in the milieu of, and as an intellectual response to, the various struggles for political and cultural freedom from long-institutionalised oppressor powers taking place around the world.

For the colonised to regain their freedom and begin to construct a new identity based on pre-colonial models, a critical analysis of history, literature and culture is imperative. Post-colonialism has tried, and is presently trying, to deal with and understand the legacy of colonial rule. The relationship between 'the self' and 'the other' – their struggle, literature, language, education, violence, power, culture, imperialism, and representation have become recognised as central issues of post-colonial theory. Ashcroft *et al.*, in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, outlines the field of postcolonial theory:

> Post colonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. None of these is "essentially" post-colonial, but together they form the complex of the fabric of the field. (2)

Drawing clear borders for post-colonial theory is no simple task, and such efforts are still a contemporary and common ground for the heated debates in the academic world. The word "post" plays a somewhat confusing role as it can give a false idea that the field of the post-colonial only deals with the period after colonialism. In the book *The Empire Writes Back*, the term 'post-colonial' is used:

> . . . to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day…because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. (2)

The authors also suggest that "it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted" (2). Thus, post-colonial theory deals with the not only the post-colonial period but also the colonial and pre-colonial periods.

While discussing the boundaries of the post-colonial era, Childs and Williams enlarge on this point: “There is a form of perverseness in taking the label ‘post-’ for a state which is not yet fully present, and linking it to something which has not fully disappeared, but in many ways this paradoxical in-betweenness precisely characterizes the post-colonial world” (7). Moreover, “post-colonialism is much more to do with the painful experience of confronting the desire to recover ‘lost’ pre-colonial identities, the impossibility of actually doing so, and the task of construction some new identity on the basis of this impossibility” (14).

1.1 The Emergence of Postcolonial Theory

In 1978 Edward Said with his book *Orientalism* made a contribution to post-colonial theory that would be hard to overestimate. Even Young, who finds Said’s work theoretically problematic, accepts the fact that “the introduction of the idea that colonialism operated not only as a form of military rule but also simultaneously as a discourse of domination was the achievement of Said” (383). With the publication of Said’s *Orientalism* the post-colonialism debate moved inexorably into the purview of academia. As Childs and Williams claim, “without the impetus that *Orientalism* provided (and continues to provide) Colonial Discourse Analysis and Post-Colonial Theory might not have cohered or constituted themselves as an area of theoretical inquiry in the way that they did” (98). Macfie, in the preface of his book *Orientalism: A Reader*, emphasises Said’s impact on First World academe: “It was evident that in his critique of orientalism Said had struck a raw nerve, and that the orientalists present did not know quite how to respond”.

In *Orientalism*, Said analyses how the West achieved and continues to achieve control over the East and details the continuing unequal power relationship between West and East. He claims that West used the colonial discourse as a tool to control and dominate "the other". Said examines the discourse of the West and its processes by which the "Orient" was, and continues to be, constructed in European thinking. For Said, "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' (most of the time) and 'the Occident'" (2). While the "Orient" stands for the eastern part of the world, the "Occident" represents the nominally western part, essentially largely equivalent to Europe and America.

Said claims that "The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1). The West's view of the East is full of humiliation, degradation and prejudice. Said demonstrated the ways in which the West proclaimed for themselves the right to represent that East from their own self-complimentary perspective, the right to talk for and about the East, primarily through the mouthpiece of the intellection writings of the set of Europeans scholars on the East who styled themselves Orientalists. Said links this idea with Marx's well-known expression: "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented" (1). The colonising powers, via the collective voice of the Orientalists, created an Orient that lacked the ability to talk on its own behalf. This image imposed on "the other" had far-reaching implications in terms of power relations and attempted to force an Eastern belief in the incapability of self-representation not only in political but also aesthetical terms.

To a certain extent, Eastern power was a potential threat to the West, yet, at the same time for the imperial nations, it was a source of untold resources and hence wealth, and as imperial power grew in the East so did the comprehension that one could not exist without the other. Moreover, through the Orientalist's discourse, the East came to play the role of the perfect "other" for the West. In order that they might control this threat and exploit this wealth, the West needed to dominate and recreate the East. This explains why colonialism is constructed on a conflicting and paradoxical base from the beginning.

Western colonial discourse positioned the West as more civilised and more educated than the rest of the world and as a consequence, it was argued that it was the duty of Western civilisation to take other, less developed societies under their wings. As Said puts it:

> [R]epresentations have purposes, they are effective much of the time, they accomplish one or many tasks. Representations are formations, or as Ronald Barthes has said of all the operations of language, they are deformations. The Orient as a representation in Europe is formed – or deformed – out of a more and more specific sensitivity towards a geographical region called "the East." Specialists in this region do their work on it, so to speak, because in time their profession as Orientalists requires that they present their society with images of the Orient, knowledge about it, and insight into it. (273)

Thus, although the term 'Orientalist' was used to denote academics who studied the Orient and was a prestigious title until the late twentieth century, Said's *Orientalism* heralded in a negative connotative change for the word, whereby now it is commonly used to refer to representations of the East "perceived as stereotyped or exoticizing and therefore embodying a colonialistic attitude" ("orientalism"). More than this, Said argues that the works of orientalists serve the political and economic purposes of the Western world, namely, colonialism and imperialism. With the help

of Orientalism the West creates an East to dominate it. In short, Said defines Orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the other" (3).

1.2. The Process of Creating "the Other"

The East has served the West as "its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" and has been taken the advantage of as a "terrain of literary exploitation" (Said 1-2). Such literary exploitation was enacted at a multitude of levels. Said insists that we must keep "vivid the sense of layer upon layer of interests, official learning, institutional pressure, that covered the Orient as a subject matter and as a territory during the latter half of the nineteenth century" (192). And notes that for Westerners "even the most innocuous travel book – and there were literary hundreds written after mid-century – contributed to the destiny of public awareness of the Orient" (192), let alone the "authoritative reports of scholarly travelers, missionaries, governmental functionaries, and other expert witnesses" (192).

Along side the academic study of the West, a great many European important writers or literature, including La Martin, Chateaubriand, Flaubert and Nerval, produced literary works about the East. The representation of the East by the Westerners, however, never reflected the real East. It was the reflection of the East imagined by the West. In *Orientalism*, Said exposes this process of cultural representation of the other in his criticism of French novelist Gustave Flaubert's description of the Egyptian courtesan Kuchuk Hanem:

> The Orient was Orientalised not only because it was discovered to be "Oriental" in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it could be – that is,

> submitted to being – made Oriental. There is very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was a foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was "typically Oriental." (6)

What Said is describing here is a specific power imbalance that can be generalised to the whole of the interplay between West and East. "Flaubert's situation of strength in relation to Kuchuk Hanem was not isolated instance. It fairly stands for the pattern of relative strength between East and West, and the discourse about the Orient that it enabled" (6).

Hence Flaubert symbolises the coloniser, and the Kuchuk Hanem the colonised. Flaubert possesses Kuchuk Hanem and deprives her of the opportunity to represent herself.

The perception of "the other" is full of prejudice and humiliation. The idea that there is one single definition of the other results in stereotyping and reducing the Orient into a simple story. In the literature produced by the Orientalists – even, Said argues, in the most seemingly objective examples – it is impossible to see the other as equally as human. Characterisations of laziness, violence and the exotic are basic issues. Any question of misrepresentation is necessarily absent and in this way, the coloniser oppresses the colonised in order to keep them silent.

At the end of his book, Said argues that those Westerners who are able to accept that the idea that different is just different – as opposed to automatically categorising what is different as better or worse – will serve not the benefits of solely one group but all humanity. With the honour of succeeding in discussing Orientalism

in the forms of an academic discipline, at the end of his book he summarizes the points he has wanted to clarify throughout the book.

> I consider Orientalism's failure to have been a human as much as an intellectual one […] Above all, I hope to have shown my reader that the answer to Orientalism is not Occidentalism. […] If the knowledge of Orientalism has any meaning, it is in being a reminder of the seductive degradation of knowledge, of any knowledge, anywhere, at any time. Now perhaps more than before. (328)

The West has for all too long interposed itself on the civilisation and culture of the East by oppression, by patronising and dividing, and, as will see in our analysis of Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, one of the outcomes of the imperialist endeavour was the resulting mass migrations under the claim that such migration would provide the diaspora with wealth, democracy, civilisation and freedom. Quite to the contrary, today it is evident that in every country in which foreign powers intervened with the promise of development and civilisation there is still high levels of underdevelopment, disintegrated communities and, on the personal level, the problem of ambivalent identity in the post-colonial world.

1.3. Culture and Identity

Postcolonial theory, among its other concerns, deals with two important interrelated concepts, namely, culture and identity. In his 1994 book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said questions how cultural power and privilege determines modern identity. The inter-connectedness of culture and imperialism are two aspects of the book. According Said, The impact of cultural imperialism is more extensive than colonialism, as it continues after colonialism and infects people more rapidly and effectively. For Said imperialism is inextricably link to geography, it is "an act of

geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control" (271), and thus "for the native, the history of colonial servitude is inaugurated by loss of the locality to the outsider (271). In order to rectify this, to attempt to regain some of that which was lost "geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored" (271).

Here Said hints at the potentiality for undoing, of reversing, some of the deleterious effects of imperialism. Noam Chomsky, writing on the back cover of *Culture and Imperialism*, points out that "Edward Said helps us to understand who we are and what we must do if we are to aspire to be moral agents, not servants of power."

Said draws attention to the cumulative effect of the imperial endeavour on identity when he notes that "Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale", and hence "no one today is purely one thing" (271). Further, in the final chapter of *Culture and Imperialism*, 'Freedom from Domination in the Future', he discusses a possible future for those who have suffered colonialist oppression and still struggling with this. As an antidote, he puts forward the idea that "one needs to have a balance and negotiation of all these identities" (389). Imperialism's

> worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. (407)

There is no use in insisting on a genuine and indigenous identity in today's world. As a result of colonialism, transnationalism, and globalism, people have ended up with multiple, hybrid identities; which rather than being belittled or stigmatised should be accepted as richness. Indeed, such identities they are still under construction. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall notes:

> Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production" which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (234)

1.4. Diaspora, Postcolonial Identity and Ambivalence

When analysing postcolonial identities that have spread all around the world, it is impossible not to mention the term "diaspora". Dufoix discusses what diaspora is in his chapter with the same title by praising Gabriel Sheffer's definition, "Modern diasporas are ethnic minority groups of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin – their homelands" (21). Hall goes on to add:

> A "diaspora" must therefore have a number of factors involving the origin of the (voluntary or forced) migration; settlement in one or several countries; maintenance of identity; and finally, relations between the living state, the host state, and the diaspora itself, the last of which may become a link between the first two. (21)

Until the 1950s "diaspora" was a term that was largely used to refer to religious communities. However, the entry for the term "diaspora" in the 1931 edition of the American *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* states clearly that limiting diaspora to the Jewish diaspora or only religious history would be narrowing down its meaning and usage: "Diaspora is a Greek term for a nation or part of a

nation separated from its own state or territory and dispersed among other nations but preserving its natural culture" (qtd. in Dufoix 17). By the 1960s "diaspora" had become well accepted term and concept in the lexicon of social sciences.

As a result of the influence of postmodernism and then post-colonialism in the 1980s, the academic field of 'cultural studies' started analysing postcolonial subcultures such as minorities, immigrants, workers and so on. It focused on the paradoxical identity, the non-centre, and hybridity.

Theorist Homi Bhabha played an important role in bringing a new perspective to the postcolonial theory world; where Said focuses on the differences and the binaries of the coloniser and colonised, Bhabha claims similarities between the two. In his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*, he argues that the "objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience" (334). He conceptualises a new hybrid persona that is "neither the one thing nor the other" (49).

Dufoix in summarising the postcolonial vision of diaspora writes, "the "diasporic idea" allows one to go beyond the simplistic view of certain oppositions (continuity/rupture, centre/periphery) to grasp the complex, that is, the joint presence of the Same and the Other, the local and the global" (24-25). In other words, ambivalence and in-betweenness are hidden in the concept itself; diaspora has an ambiguous nature. In 1990 Stuart Hall one of the pioneers of the field stipulated that he used the term 'diaspora'

> metaphorically, not literally: diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into sea. This is the old, imperialising, hegemonising form of 'ethnicity.' … The diaspora experience … is defined not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary

> heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. (1-18)

Dufoix analogises the term "diaspora" via the god Janus of ancient Roman mythology. Janus is the god of gates, doors, doorways, beginnings and endings. His name is the origin of the name of the month January, that which ends the previous year and begins the new year. Janus is depicted as a man with two faces or heads each facing in opposite directions, symbolising the past and the future. According to Dufoix this "allows dispersion to be thought of either as a state of incompleteness or a state of completeness" (34). He sums up by stating that the issue of origin arises in both cases.

A rediscovery/recovery of "the other" was necessary; constructing a possible peace with the past and then healing/reconstructing the self during the decolonising era have become the concerns of the postcolonial theorist.

Different intellectuals of the field hold different points of view about how the struggle for finding one's self is to proceed. Postcolonial theory is a theory ever evolving. Many scholars have contributed to understanding the meaning and the processes of the decolonisation. While Said, Bhabha, and Spivak mainly shaped postcolonial theory, the impact of Lacan, Foucault, Derida and Barthes who inspired them is undeniable. The role and the responsibility of the post-colonial intellectual is first to display the big picture of colonialism and then to fight with the negative effects of it by using the weapons of the coloniser.

For psychiatrist and revolutionary Franz Fanon, author of *The Wretched of the Earth*, a seminal study of colonisation and decolonisation, colonisers and the natives embracing their values are to be classified as enemies. He views the

colonised as mentally ill, and stresses that the form of resistance should be violent and with arms. Violence is a means of cure to save people from the cultural disease infected by the colonial subjugation. As the colonisation period was full of violence, Fanon claims the decolonisation process should also involve violence and claims that "decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon" (27).

Whilst Fanon concerned himself with the actual process of removing the colonisers from power, the process does not end with the acquisition of political independence. The effects of colonisation linger, and this fact has been addressed by other scholars.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is one successful contributor to the debate. In his 1986 essay *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngũgĩ points out that the colonisers accomplish their aim of controlling the economy, politics and cultures of the colonised through "physical violence" and then "psychological violence" (9). He explains the construction process of colonialism:

> The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth […] Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people received themselves and relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others. (16)

Therefore, according to Ngũgĩ, economic and social control can be achieved through mental control. He believes in the importance of literature and language in the struggle against colonialism because the language and literature of the colonisers serve to alienate the colonised from their own culture and themselves. For Ngũgĩ, the

Third World intellectual needs to be aware of this danger posed by using the languages of the former colonisers and the West.

In *Decolonising the Mind* Ngũgĩ promotes the necessity of African languages in African literature, which function as the carrier of culture. He views language as both a means of communication and a carrier of culture, and believes that African culture can only be truly conveyed via African languages. He argues that pre-colonial African literature has powerfully been able to reflect African social structure. He criticises African writers writing in English, and denominates their literature "Afro-European literature" (27), as distinct from African literature. On the other hand, Ngũgĩ, who defends the necessity of native language in literature, suggests that one should learn other cultures and languages after understanding and celebrating his own language, culture and literature.

Besides the importance of language, Ngũgĩ discusses the importance of religious, cultural and educational institutions in the colonisation process, which also served to alienate the colonised people from their native culture. Writing on Ngũgĩ, academic James A. Ogude states that the religion imposed on the colonised is used as a means of social ostracism. According to Ngũgĩ, the religion with all the other cultural elements of the coloniser opened a "psychological wound…on the whole generation" (qtd. in Ogude 91).

Some critics and writers, however, defend the use of English or other European languages in literature. They cite as a positive outcome of writing in English its function of uniting African people with a variety of languages, and the idea of resisting colonial power with their own weapon. Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe is one of the intellectuals who believes in the necessity of using European

languages, albeit in an adapted style. He argues in his classic essay *The African Writer and the English Language*:

> I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit new African surroundings. (qtd. in Ngũgĩ 8)

Nevertheless, they could not help but find themselves in an ambivalent situation of feeling guilty and betrayal.

Ambivalence has been the challenge of not only the educated class but also the other classes in colonised societies. As Bruce Berman states,

> The development and character of the African petit-bourgeoisie in Kenya, and elsewhere in colonial Africa, cannot be understood outside its deeply ambivalent relationship with the colonial state. This ambivalence, expressed in sharply contrasting and often alternating patterns of collaboration and conflict, encouragement and constraint, attraction and rejection, was felt by both African and the colonial authorities and was grounded in some of the most fundamental contradictions of colonialism. (qtd. in Ogude 99-100)

The term 'ambivalence', which is first used by Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler, and can be defined as "the co-existence of the two classes of instinct such as love and hate" (Childs and Williams 124). Bhabha, who applies this concept in post-colonial theory, suggests that both fear of "the other" and the desire for it are a part of the colonial discourse. That is to say, it is not possible to exist without interacting with "the other" even in a colonised society that is divided into many social classes. The in-between situations and areas produced due to the ambivalent nature of colonialism are topics of postcolonial writers and theoreticians.

To sum up, it can be said that post-colonial period and theory cannot be understood without analysing the literary products of the period. The works of

literature produced at the post-colonial period have great importance in reflecting the long and suffering period, the issues and the people of that time. Moreover, literature, as a vehicle carrying the culture and the values of societies, contributes to the struggle for regaining new freedom, and both reconstructing the culture and the identity of the colonised, as well as forging new identities. Therefore, novel as a literary genre has "important didactic and social functions" (Achebe qtd. in Wise 1063) and inspires many others as it reaches out to more people in a society. Albert Memmi is another influential third world academician who highlights the power of the writer in his book *Decolonization and the Decolonized*. He discusses the relation between the fiction and reality,

> [W]riters have marvellous tool at their disposal, imagination, which allows them to make believe. They can attribute to the fictional characters things they themselves feel and think. Fifty novels from a given period provide a richer source of insight than tons of newsprint published during the reign of a dictator. Balzac and Maupassant do a better job of reflecting their epoch, its dramas and social milieu, than the conformist analyst of the same period. (36)

In light of the things mentioned above, a postcolonial reading of M.G. Vassanji's novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, which depicts the society and the history of Kenya through its bitter path to freedom in the decolonisation period, offers a valuable insight in relation to the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods.

CHAPTER II

DECOLONIZATION AND THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY

When attempting to analyse any novel, it is necessary to position the novel in the time of its social and political setting. Fiction written during the decolonisation process can be studied in the light of history as the narratives of the postcolonial writers reflect the society that has been shaped under the political atmosphere of those days. Ogude claims that "both fiction and history, while having marked differences, also share similarities. Both history and literature invoke the principle of selection and derive their material from specific cultures and historical experiences" (88). Therefore, literary works of art whilst not actual history, can be regarded as representations of history.

Ashcroft *et al.*, to emphasise the significance of history for postcolonial discourse, argue that history is a tool to legitimise a resistance: "History and legitimisation go hand in hand; history legitimates 'us' not other" (1995: 355). Historical narratives by postcolonial intellectuals form a platform upon which the world can be shown the other side of the coin. In other words, they put forward the argument that history is subjective rather than objective. On the other hand, Ashcroft *et al.* state that the postcolonial task "is not simply to contest the message of history, which has so often relegated individual postcolonial societies to footnotes, to the marsh of progress, but also to engage in the medium of narrativity itself, to reinscribe the 'rhetoric', the heterogeneity of historical representation" (1995: 356). So, the postcolonial literary canon challenges the facts of the Western world and presents the (hi)story of its people where they can find themselves.

> Since the West has a deplorable record of simultaneously denying the existence of any worthwhile history in areas it colonized (Africa is the most obvious example) and destroying the cultures which embodied that history, an important dimension of post-colonial work has been the recovery or revaluing of indigenous histories. (Childs and Williams 8)

This rediscovery of the past, and so the present, which Fanon defines as "passionate research" is important not only to redeem the colonised in their own and the coloniser's eyes, nor to validate the existence of pre-colonial history and culture, but also to trigger "a change of fundamental importance in the colonised's psycho-affective equilibrium" (2004: 148). According to Fanon the decolonised is in a state of trauma due to the destructive nature of colonialism:

> Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonised brain of any form or substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonised people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it. (2004: 149)

Therefore, he argues, the rehabilitation process is the responsibility of third world intellectuals and adds that the "colonised intellectual who wants to put his struggle on a legitimate footing, who is intent on providing proof and accepts to bare himself in order to better display the history of his body, is fated to journey deep into the very bowels of his people" (2004: 149).

In 2003 Kenyan-born M.G. Vassanji appeared on the postcolonial stage and does exactly what Fanon has demanded of the colonised intellectual. Although Vassanji is writing of a decolonisation that took place many ago, he was born in Nairobi in 1952, and grew up in Tanzania. Vassanji's novel, *The In-between World of Vikram Lall*, is a revealing exposé of how colonialism, decolonisation and postcolonialism construct ambivalent identities. The novel adds a new and sympathetic voice to the process of this 'profound search', as Stuart Hall puts it, "not

the rediscovery but the *production* of identity" (235). Vassanji has made a contribution to the reconstruction/recreation of a new identity – "not an identity grounded in archeology, but in the *retelling* of the past" (Hall 235).

As Vassanji is able to reveal, there was a melange of social, historical, and political reasons underlying the ambivalent identities in the novel. The world the novel depicts is a tangled skein of interwoven threads, the Asian Diaspora in Africa, the bloody independence struggle of the Mau Mau, the political corruption that followed the forming of the nation-state, all of which are inseparably responsible for the causing of the ambivalence or in-betweenness that wreaks so much personal and interpersonal confusion and distress.

2.1. The Indian as Immigrant

M.G. Vassanji constructs his narratives and fictional worlds around the colonially tailored societies. He is nourished by the cultural heritage of his grandfathers who migrated to East Africa from South Asia. Therefore, in order to fully understand Vikram Lall and his in-between world, the Indian Diaspora in East Africa that shapes the fictional setting of *The In-between World of Vikram Lall*, needs to be analysed.

The term "diaspora" is traced back to the expulsion of the Jews during the ancient times from Babylon to the various parts of the world. It is first commonly used to refer only to physically scattered religious groups living as minorities among other people and other faiths. Dufoix, in his book *Diasporas*, while explaining the history and definition of the word states that "starting in the 1970s, this ancient word underwent an amazing inflation that peaked in the 1990s" and has become a popular

word to be applied for most of the world's people in print, radio, and television. It has become a frequent vocabulary item of "representatives of national and religious communities, as well as state authorities careful not to lose touch with the descendants of former emigrants; and it is a part of the conceptual arsenal of scholars in migration topics" (1). Therefore, "diaspora" is now a term that refers to any kind of displacement of people and the maintenance of the connection with the 'real or imagined homeland'. (1-3)

According to Dufoix, the modern usage of "diaspora" entered English as a neologism in the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek by the legendary seventy Jewish scholars in Alexandria in the third century B.C. The Greek word "diaspora" is derived from the verb *diaspeiro* which means 'dispersion' but contrary to what it generally believed it does not refer to the historic dispersion of Jews after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Moreover, the word 'diaspora' was not used to translate the Hebrew words for emigration, settlement abroad, or transportation. Several other Greek words used as translation of these words. As used in the Septuagint, "Diaspora always meant the threat of dispersion facing the Hebrews if they failed to obey God's will, and it applied almost exclusively to divine acts" (Dufoix 4). In addition, in the New Testament the church is presented as "a dispersed community of pilgrims waiting to return to the City of God" (5).

In light of the things mentioned, it is possible to say that the word "diaspora" carries an underlying meaning that implies the divine intervention which enriches its definition and explains the powerful usage of the word. The one who is exposed to migration is in a way scattered by God, which means the ties with the source of life thins. Hence, scattered peoples need to try hard not to break off the connection with

the homeland until the time they are gathered together in the City of God with their brothers. The strong desire of the immigrant to continue the survival of his culture in a new territory could be explained by the fear of getting lost in an unknown land

There are factors such as social, economic, or political that drive people to migrate to foreign lands. The immigrant society needs to share some characteristics in order to be called a Diaspora. In 1991, William Safran, the American political scientist, conceptualised the term 'diaspora' by determining the common characteristics of diasporic cultures. Cohen in his 1997 book *Global Diasporas* modified Safran's criteria for 'diaspora'. His most useful contribution to the debate of diaspora has been the inclusion of voluntary migration as a characteristic of diaspora. Besides, simple definitions of a diasporic society are likely; according to Shepherson, diaspora can be associated with any group of people who have experienced "often very bitter experiences" being forced out of their native lands by powers such as slavery and imperialism (2). As a result, there are different types of diasporas which Cohen in his book, *Global Diasporas*, groups according to their main characteristics: victim (Jews, Africans, Armenians, and Palestinians), labour (Indians), trade (Chinese), cultural (Caribbean), and imperial (British, French, Spanish, and Portuguese). Therefore Indian Diaspora, one of the main themes of Vassangi's novel, can be studied under the heading "labour diaspora" which took place as a result of labourer shortage after the slavery system was abolished in Africa.

To analyse the in-between world of Vikram Lall it is necessary to understand the historical background of Asians emigration to East Africa and how living in a diasporic culture shaped the Asian African identity because the novel's protagonist,

Vikram Lall, is a descendant of a former Indian railway-building coolie migrated to Kenya. His grandfather is from the generation of Indians who came to East Africa to build the colonial railways. Interestingly, Mochoma illuminates in his book *Stepping out of Segregation: The Changing Face of Kenyan Asians* a historical fact that these workers were not the first generation of Asians to set foot in this country (5).

Besides, it is an undeniable fact that a huge number of migrations took place after slavery was outlawed in the British, French, and Dutch colonies (in 1833, 1848, and 1863, respectively). The indenture system was established because of the shortage of man power in the colonies. Planters needed workers urgently so volunteers, most of which were Indian and Chinese, were brought and contracted to Kenya to work in the plantations of the Empire for a period of five years. In 1917 indenture was outlawed but a new labour system, under the name of the 'kangani' system, similar to the original indenture system in many ways, was instituted and more Indians migrated to work in the colonial plantations between late 1920s and 1938 (Kaur 709-710). Eventually, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the migration of many Indians as workers to East Africa, primarily merchants, bankers and clerks, in the second wave of migration, all of whom served as "imperial auxiliaries" (Hoerder 389-390) in the colony.

K. Laxmi Narayan, who has conducted a demographic study on Indian Diaspora states that "close to 28 million Indians emigrated between 1846 and 1932 to work as free or contract labourers" (qtd. in Dufoix 42). This high number of immigrants is somewhat deceptive for when the work and life conditions are considered their situation actually resembled slavery; the recruiters were ruthless, the journey was horrific and the arrangements made for the legal protection of the

workers were inadequate. Many of the Indians were moved into the places where former African slaves lived, possibly, to remind them of their position in society. Parekh depicts the life of an indentured worker:

> [He] lived on the plantation which he was forbidden to leave without a pass, worked unlimited hours, was barred from taking any other employment, and in case of misconduct subjected to financial penalty and physical punishment. In return he received a basic pay, free accommodation, food rations, and a fully or partially paid return passage to India. (605)

Despite the difficulties of the indentured labour Indians nevertheless preferred to come, primarily in order to escape from the rigid caste system that existed in the subcontinent. The promise of the land after the end of the contract was perceived as an attractive offer to the most Indians; as Levi mentions “diasporas may also arise out of a group’s attraction to a region promising greater recompense for their labour (‘labour diasporas’)” (172).

Robert G. Gregory, who deals with the history of Indian Diaspora in East Africa in his book *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations within The British Empire, 1890-1939*, draws attention to the fact that Indians were not the ‘colonial baggage’ of the British which they forgot to pack while leaving the country. On the contrary, the early Indian settlements date back to the dawn of imperialism in East Africa (14). In addition, the number of the Indian coolies who stayed in Africa is much less than what is known. According to the colonial labour, around 31,983 Indians were imported to East Africa to lay down a railway, of whom 16,312 were time expired contract labours and dismissed; 6454 were retired from service and 2493 died because of the inhuman conditions they faced. As a result 6724 is the maximum number of the ones who might have stayed in East Africa.

After the World War II, Indian independence in 1947, and the Asian Exodus in 1968, the migratory pattern of Indians in the world changed. Many Indians – 200,000 by the end of 1970s – came to Britain from East Africa, having been expelled from Uganda and Kenya in 1971 (Dufoix 43). Asian Exodus took place because "the British government, apparently in a bid to preserve the authentic nature of British society, hastened a bill to curb the flow of British Asians from Kenya. A date was set beyond which they would lose the right to enter Britain as its citizens. Their applications for Kenya citizenship had been held up or were no longer accepted, as non-citizens they could not work or do business" (Vassanji 236). A mass migration happened in a very short time as these people had no other choice. It was a devastation among the Asian community in Kenya according to Vassanji that is why he also writes on this matter in his novel.

Vikram Lall describes these days,

> The Nairobi sky reverberated with airplanes leaving at all hours, where previously only one or two would leave for Europe on overnight flights. At the airport, overflowing with passengers and well-wishers, the GSU, the dreaded General Security Unit normally used against rioting students and rowdy strikers, was sent for crowd control … So many friends and acquaintances left; families torn apart; stores which had been landmarks for decades vanished, personalities who had been fixtures in our social lives departed. Property values in Asian Eastleigh, the Punjabi haven, had plummeted. Previously arrogant men, regulars at the fashionable clubs, were reduced to quivering, stammering victims, begging my father, Please accept the keys to my property, Mr Lall, whatever price you can fetch for it, Mr Lall, will be acceptable, and send the money to such and such a bank account, in Southall, Brixton, Greenwich. Meanwhile if you can advance some cash for tickets and such … (236)

The Lall family was not affected as they all had become citizens of Kenya long ago but the situation the others were put into was not easy to handle. "It was only those

who had hung on to colonial coat-tails who were now in trouble, on their way to an England that despised them" (238).

Mangat in his book, *A History of the Asians in East Africa*, also claims that Asians came to Africa even before the British during the pre-colonial era. The entrepreneurial characteristics of Indians lead them to other countries. The East African coastal towns had been an important market for Indian merchants which became a reason of envy. Firstly under the Arab rule, then British imperial rule, and lastly under the postcolonial governments of Africa, Indians could not clear themselves from being stereotyped as "local Jews, cunning, moneymaking, crafty, cheats, thieves, intensely polite, and unscrupulous" (Mangat 25).

At the same time, the British were happy with the existence of Indians in their territory. The imperial administrative policy needed different groups to be able to 'divide and rule' the colony. Indians were an easy community to use against Arabs and also indigenous Africans in East Africa. They knew their Indians subjects very well and so did not hesitate to give them a small piece from the lion's share which would certainly turn into their benefit. In the 1820s an important policy was implemented by the British giving political support for Indian merchants trading under the British flag (Mangat 3). Many other pieces of legislation empowering Indians were passed by the British in the following years. The 'Open up the Hinterland Policy' of the 1890s let the Indians get into the hinterland regions of East Africa. Mangat analyses the consequences of this movement; the indigenous African who met the Indian before the Whites associated the two groups. That is to say, for an African the difference between an Asian and a European was not clear as both were alien to the natives. The result was Indians being considered as partners of the

Whites in the colonisation of East Africa (27). The brown man was even harder to understand for the black as the British consciously and diligently kept the two societies away from each other with the invisible boundaries.

Vassanji in his novel deals effectively with this issue, the foreignness of the two societies. Throughout the novel the sincere confessions and memories of the two friends display the gravity of the situation; it was the night of Divali, an Indian celebration, Njoroge was also at Lall's house to join the entertainments. Vikram Lall recalls the night; "Everyone was staring at Njoroge. I will never forget the sight of Nirmala Auntie's horrified expression as she took in my friend's black-black Kikuyu face. It was if her eyes had lighted a monster. Is it safe? She whispered to my mother, who replied, He is only Mwangi's grandson" (86). When he reminded that scene to Njoroge years later, "He laughed. She was terrified, he said, but so was I, she was white like a ghost, her eyes big and round and her mouth wide open. I used to be frightened of Asians, if you have to know" (87). When Vikram protested about the idea of an African being frightened of Asians, Njoroge explained; "You were in with the whites, so you had power over us. And you are so alien, more so than the whites. We never know what you think. You are so inscrutable, you Indians" (87).

The imaginary boundaries of the society were fading, thus threatening the British colonial order. The unpreventable interaction between the Indian and African society during the late 1940s and early 1950s led to the rise of Indian-instigated African nationalism which affected the majority of the Blacks. The political awakening of the naïve Africans was the last thing British would want in their 'paradise'. In order to protect themselves against this the British took some precautions to prevent the impact of Indians in Kenya, namely, the Ordinance of

1948 and the Devonshire Declaration of 1952. These determined the fate of the Indian community in East Africa as an “interstitialised” community (Mangat 126).

The 1952 Devonshire Declaration was a real turning point for the Indian question in Kenya. It put the case clearly that the early close political relations and support between the Indians and the colonial government were part of a bygone era. Now ‘intolerance’ was the appropriate word to define the new relations (Mangat 129). The new arrangement acted as a reminder to Indians that they were colonial subjects, a fact that they had almost forgotten. In the social hierarchy, they were neither first class like the Whites nor third class like the Blacks; positioned in an in-between space.

Right from the very first pages of the novel, the reader is introduced to the divided lives of a colonised country. The Lall family lives in an Asian development, in other words as part of an ‘Asian Diaspora’, and runs a store which sells goods for “Europeans and the rich Indians who emulated them” (8). Even in the shopping centre, the stores are specified according to the social classes of the colonial world. While “Lakshmi Sweets” sells snacks and tea for their Indian customers, “Arnuti’s” serves its white customers tea or coffee and colourful iced cakes and neat white sandwiches.

Vikram Lall, an Asian boy in an African colony, lives in his in-between world with his sister Deepa and their white and black friends. Even though they are kids, all are both capable and well-practised at understanding and behaving according to their respective roles in the social hierarchy. The discrimination of races even reigns for kids, “my sister and I could go to Arnuti’s, where we were allowed a corner table

outside, though our black friend Njoroge, who with quite a straight face, head in the air and hands in his pockets, would proudly wander off'(8).

Their childhood white friends, Bill and Annie, are different in many ways.

> They had rather refined accents, their language sharp and crystalline and musical, beside which ours seemed a crude approximation, for we had learned it at school and knew it to be the language of power and distinction but could never speak it their way. …But these barriers of class and prestige were not so inviolable or cruel at our level, and we did become friends. (10)

Vassanji cleverly juxtaposes the children's world with that of the adults and thereby highlights the complex and difficult situation of diasporic communities and identities; the children's world is one that changes for the worse as the children mature and become more and more embroiled in the awful society of their elders.

2.1.1. African Asians – Belonging and Alienation

One of the main problems confronting diasporic identities is their ambivalent relation with the land they live. Whether to call it home or not causes problems of how they define themselves. The Lall family suffers from the same problem, the dilemma of belonging and the sense of alienation to the land they live in. They live in an Indian Diaspora and try to preserve their Indian social life and cultural heritage. In his book *Diasporas*, Dufoix highlights this as a common diasporic characteristic: "Dispersion implies distance, so maintaining or creating connections becomes a major goal in reducing or at least dealing with that distance" (3).

Vassanji creates the Lall family as a typical example of a second generation Indian family in East Africa. Father Lall is an African-born Indian while the mother is Indian-born. While the father accepts Africa as home, the mother still cannot go

beyond the boundaries she has drawn for herself and her family. On the other hand, the children, Deepa and Vikram, want to have their own way of life as an Indian-origin Kenya citizen. Kenya is certainly more like a home for them than India which they have never visited. They have bonds with the land they live in. Vikram Lall invokes the Indian-built railway in Kenya as the Indians' claim to the land:

> We have been Africans for three generations, not counting my own children. Family legend has it that one of the rails on the railway line just outside the Nakuru station has engraved upon it my paternal grandfather's name, Anand Lal Peshawari, in Punjabi script – and many another rail of the line has inscribed upon it the name and birthplace of an Indian labourer. (16)

That is true not only for the Lall family but for all Indians living in Kenya. In the 1800s they came to build the railways through the country which will carry life all around Kenya like the vessels in the human body. Lall tells the bitter story of his grandfather's generation proudly:

> [They were] recruited from an assortment of towns in north-west India and brought to an alien, beautiful, and wild country at the dawn of the twentieth century. Our people had sweated on it, had died on it: they had been carried away in their weary sleep or even wide awake by man-eating lions of magical ferocity and cunning, crushed under avalanches of blasted rock, speared machete as proxies of the whites by angry Kamba, Kikuyu, and Nandi warriors, infected with malaria, sleeping sickness, elephantiasis, cholera; bitten by jiggers, scorpions, snakes, and chameleons; and wounded in vicious fights with each other. (16-17)

Although "For every mile of railway track laid, four Indians died" (19), many decided to stay in this promising new land. Lall's grandfather was one of those who decided to stay in the new colony after his indenture and picked Nakuru as the place he would like to live.

The primary reason that drove such men to leave the land of their birth and the home of childhood memories for a journey into the unknown is said to be poverty

at home, yet, they all have their own individual reasons and stories for leaving home. Lall's grandfather preferred to stay because after the death of his father he had a quarrel with his elder brother who became the only shopkeeper and moneylender in his village.

Grandfather Lall is a happy old man who entertains his grandchildren with the stories he tells. The stories carry the signs of his life in India and Kenya but the preference of the children is for stories about Kenya: "The lion stories were always the favourite, because they were scarier and so much more immediate and realistic than the Indian tales of Lakshman and Rama and Sita speaking with monkeys and devils in the enchanted forests of a distant land" (19). India is only "a distant land" for an Indian boy who was born in Africa. Vikram Lall confesses as a third generation Indian in Africa: "India was always fantasyland to me" (20).

Grandfather Lall is an important figure in Vikram Lall's life. Vikram found great pleasure in accompanying his Dada and Juma-dada on their Sunday afternoon walks. They were "old cronies more than seventy years old" (59) and had a unique relationship. These two old friends find an interesting joy in visiting the railway station nearby and examining the things around them. Vikram found peace in these two old men's company even though he could not understand them clearly. The alienation to the language was an inevitable consequence and it had already started for Vikram. "I wished I could understand all that they said. But they spoke in a fluid Punjabi too quick for my ears, and the words and phrases I grasped were often alien to me" (61).

Anand Lall and Juma Molabux, who first came to Kenya under indentureship, were now wealthy enough Indians to have African servants. They had made enough

money from hard work to regain their honour in this foreign land. They had a big family with sons, daughter-in-laws, and grandchildren and a decent Asian community. However nothing was enough in a colony inhabited by people with coloured skin to enable them to reach an equal level with the whites. White men grudged neither respect nor understanding to these two old men for their faithful labour and innocent concern to the railway. On the contrary, what they got from the white men was only humiliation. In one of those Sunday walks, the two were discussing hotly the quality of metal sleepers over wooden ones near the tracks and walking when they strayed to close to an area exclusively set aside for whites:

> [F]rom the Railway Restaurant (Europeans-only), a man came angrily and bawled us out. What are you doing here? Jao, jao, kambakht! Who gave you permission to come inside? Imbeciles! They climbed back, apologizing profusely – Sorry huzoor – which made the red-faced man ever madder, and I thought he would strike one of them. The station master hurried up and also started apologizing profusely to the white man, then added, These two gentlemen, you see, sir were coolies who worked on the construction of the railway. (61)

Vikram recalls how he felt that day, "they had been severely humiliated, and I was close to tears that someone would talk to my dada that way. … I did not tell a soul about the incident" (62). Not surprisingly, the station master was a son of a former railway coolie, and most of the workers on the railway were Indians.

Despite all the humiliations and difficulties, Vikram was really interested in trains and the railway:

> There was nothing more impressive for me in the world. Bill could go and become a fighter pilot chasing enemies when he grew up, Njoroge could become Moses to his people; I would be an engineer of locomotives, racing the length and breadth of the country, from Mombasa to Nairobi, through Nakuru and all the way to Kisumu or Kampala, and then back again, from Indian Ocean to Lake Victoria on that steady rhythm – a-jeeka-jeeka . . . grunt, grunt . . . a-jeeka-jeeka.. . grunt, grunt . . . a-jeeka-jeeka-jeeka-jeeka-jeeka-jeeka – on the railway

> line that my grandfather and Juma-dada and Ghalib and Buleh Shah and the other folk had left their homes in Punjab to build. (63)

Vikram's dream of being an engineer of locomotives and his connection to the railway is the only peaceful moments of his life. The job promises him a continuous and everlasting residency. The railway is a sign of belonging for him and for most Indians. It symbolises a concrete tie that connects Indians to Kenya. The memoirs of the Indian workers prove that they are a part of this country.

Vikram's father also loves trains and knows a lot about them like any proud nationalist Indian in Africa, yet he was alien to the most of the references about India when Vikram's mother and Mahesh Uncle talked about their native land. Vikram's father did not even have very much information about the independence struggle of India. Instead, he was schooled by his father about the first Indians in Kenya and their connection to the railway like his brothers and other Indian kids in the Diaspora.

However it is possible to say that for the father Lall India does not mean much. He had been there only once, to get married, and returned with many disappointments about India. Vikram Lall describes his father as "proudly Kenyan, hopelessly colonial." The cause of ambivalence and in-betweenness is not only the fact of living in a Diaspora, but of being simultaneously a colonised subject. The impossibility of escaping from being 'the other', despite doing one's best efforts to claim allegiance to the Queen and the Empire, is the greatest problem facing those who have been happy and proud with the colonial order.

The ambivalence is even worse for Vikram's mother. She had lost her mother when she was a child. Her father – an inspector working for the British – married her to Vikram's father so that she could be 'safe' in Africa, "where the empire is still

held firm, English values and manners still ruled the day" (22) during the social and political turmoil of the Indian of the 1940s. After she moved to Kenya, her brother Mahesh, labelled a communist by his own father and the Lall family, followed her. Soon after their arrival, India gained independence from Britain. However, the independence and partition of India only gave them pain as it meant a door's being closed that previously had been left ajar offering some hope of turning back. After Partition, the Lall family hometown was no more a part of India: "That weighted heavily on all our family, but especially on those two, the freshest arrivals … Peshawar, our ancestral home, had become an alien, hostile place; it was in Pakistan" (23). According to Mahesh, after the independence of India, cutting up the country was another example of British policy: divide and rule. It was not the desire of ordinary Hindus and Muslims as it was claimed to be. The situation for the siblings was heavier than the others in the big Lall family; Mother and Mahesh now had nowhere in India they could call home. The mere knowledge that there is a place you can return one day is a great relief to the self. For them, the ordinary diasporic life will never be easy as for the others in the family as their birthplace is lost to the new Muslim nation state of Pakistan. They share "a deep sense of exile from their birth place", and although the "rest of [the] family could somehow share in that exile" it was "not with the same intensity" (81).

The Indian community clings onto their native customs in their new home – East Africa. It is their way of preserving their Indian identity without which they believe they would be lost. In the novel, Vassanji takes particular care to render family gatherings and Indian rituals vividly. Diwali is one of these important events that is celebrated elaborately and with great joy. "Diwali is the day when Lord Rama

returned victorious to Ayodhya, an enchanted place in far-off India, having defeated the ten-headed demon Ravana, way south on the island of Lanka" (78). Weeks before the festival day, Lall's house is transformed into a heavenly place reflective of the glorious Ayodhya of ancient India. Mrs Lall makes great effort in carrying on the Indian traditions with a great delight; for her, it is her only way to preserve her culture in an alien land and instil it in her children that it may continue. Although the language is hard for Deepa and Vikram to understand they listen to the Hindustani service of the KBC which tells stories from the Ramayana.

Mrs Lall is inspired by Indian mythology and makes her children, and sometimes even Njoroge, listen to her stories about Rama and Sita. For her, myth and reality are not to be strictly alienated from one another.

> In Mother's eyes, the supposed leader of the Mau Mau, Jomo Kenyatta, who had been imprisoned at Kapenguria, with all his wiles was the demon Ravana himself, sometimes it was the Mau Mau that collectively become Ravana. And I, somewhat evilly perhaps, always wondered if she sometimes saw Rama and Sita as her brother Mahesh and herself, and Africa as the forest of exile. And Papa as the monster Ravana who stole her away? And as wise but erring Dasaratha, my grandfather Verma, whom Mahesh Uncle had called a traitor? But that whole comparison was monstrous and I would be embarrassed by it. (81)

Indeed, feelings of alienation run deep in diasporic identities. Even in the happiest moments in Kenya Mrs Lall could not feel a complete belonging to the land. During their trip to Nairobi, when Father asked if she had seen a beauty and vastness like that in her country, she smiled and replied, "This is where I have married and made my home … this is my husband's and children's country" (106).

The first time Vikram ever ventured out of his small diasporic world was when the Lall family took a trip to Nairobi and Mombasa – "halfway to London"

(108). The Indian community in Kenya knew each other well and had similar and connected lives. In each town there was an Indian main street, with the same squat shop-houses of brick, with stores similar to the ones in Nakuru (106). At the same time, the Indians who live in the big cities like Nairobi are naturally modern and 'savvy'. It is in Nairobi with the country cousins during their visit that Vikram learned to play "cricket the proper way, competitively" (107).

However, colonialism sets the unchangeable social hierarchy in the lands it occupies. The boundaries are impossible to stretch even you are qualified enough to climb the invisible ladder of the social status. It does not matter how educated or rich you are. The only thing that counts is having a white skin. The blacks or browns, in short "the other" have to know their place and limits. Vassanji elucidates this point dramatically by deflating the entire Nairobi trip. The Lall family, and especially the children, are reminded of the gulf between them and the whites with a bitter experience during their visit to Nairobi.

For the Lall family an exciting thing to do in Nairobi was to go to Abrahamson London Gents' Tailor, a prestigious outfitter in Kenya, and buy a new suit for the Father Lall. Unfortunately, the visit to the posh shop was a disappointment. After finally deciding on the material, when the Indian assistant was taking the measurements, the European man in the shop interfered in a patronising attitude and voice, "Ay, you going to use the same tape on me as the coolie?" (110). They left the shop without a suit when the Indian shop assistant apprehensively assured the man that they have a different tape that they use only for Europeans.

They bought a suit for the Father in Nakuru but from another retailer, Ahmed Brothers, the third or the fourth name from the top, which also promised London

fashions but at a half price and used the same tape measure for Asians and Europeans. Whether they use the same one for Africans was something the Lall family did not bother to worry about then. This episode preoccupied Vikram Lall's mind and made him realise how ignorant they were not to empathise with the Africans although they suffered from the same unfair prejudices. Asians in Africa did not want to or could not see that they were on the same side as the Africans since they preferred to stay within the boundaries of their diaspora communities. It is discussable whether this was their own choice or not; but nevertheless, it was again the Europeans who were successful with their 'divide and rule' policy. Naturally, in East Africa the colonists had little difficulty in isolating Asians from Africans by utilising the many noticeable cultural, social, religious, and physical differences.

The Indians living in Africa never thought of another way of life. Even if they moved places, they kept their status in the diaspora culture. For instance, when the Lall family moved to Nairobi, they set up a new life in a similar Asian Diaspora to that of Nakuru. Vikram and Deepa segued into Nairobi's typical suburban Asian community, which was different in style to their life in Nakuru, but still an Asian way of interpreted city life. Vikram describes their Asian Diaspora life in Nairobi,

> Our life in Nairobi was a vast departure from the intimate family life we had lived before in a small town. The city was a place of hustle and bustle, of high costs and many temptations. Papa had taken up with regulars at the Indian Gymkhana, and sometimes he came home late in the evenings, having played cards, smelling of whisky. There started to appear some strain between our parents …
> How easy it was to lose the certainty, the simplicity we had once possessed, despite that shadow of terror, in Nakuru: the school, the quiet afternoons, the Sunday family meals and stories, the walks to the railway station. Even the many quarrels of those times between my various uncles seemed like happy, comical interludes.

> … that family contentment, that certainty of my early years, we had lost forever. Suddenly my parents seemed older and tired and disengaged from each other. (146-147)

Life had not been easy for the Lall family when they first arrived in Nairobi. Especially for Vikram's father, he first opened a grocery store in the busy Indian shopping area in partnership with his cousins. Not only he was alien to the business he also found it demeaning. Mr Lall, who once had sold luxurious items, even caviar, to Europeans, was now dealing with Asian customers, "telling people that yes, Monkey Brand charcoal tooth powder was better than Colgate and sat-isab-gol was a traditional remedy for indigestion recommended by ancient Indian yogis and infinitely superior to Eno's Fruit Salts (145-146).

Immigrants, minorities, and people in diaspora situations have their own reasons to connect to each other in an unknown land. Lall's case in Nairobi is a typical example of solidarity. Hari Sharma, an Asian estate agent in Nairobi, is considered a 'saviour'. This man advised Vikram's father that "at independence time it's property that changes hands, and the middle man takes away the profit" (146) as experienced in India and Pakistan. Mr Lall followed this man's advice and was in the business as Kenya's independence approached and many Europeans were putting up their properties for sale. Fortune smiled once more upon the Lall family, however this could never bring back the warm atmosphere of the old days.

Vassanji draws a distinction between the different diasporic experiences of the different Lall generations. Along with all the troubles of a big city, Nairobi offered pleasures for its young people. "There were English movies at the Twentieth Century, Hindi ones at the Odeon and Shan, picnics at the National Park, the fetes at

the Railway Club. And there was a feeling that you were moving with the times, in this atomic age, and, if you were young, the sun was shining on you" (147).

On the other hand, nothing was moving forwards for the middle-aged members of the Asian Diaspora – Mr and Mrs Lall. They were closed to changes in their way of life. Naturally there were some changes as it was inevitable under the social and political atmosphere of Kenya. However, they stuck to the customs and traditions of their small world. Even the most open-minded Mr Lall was pretty conservative contrary to the expectations. Vikram stated; "Like many others of my generation, I was confident that our parents would have to change their ways in our new world. They would take their time, but they would surely change. For now, however, they were too inconsistent and confused about where they stood and who they were, even as they called themselves Kenyans" (150).

This process of change takes time and means hard times for all, especially when disparities arise from the different levels of acculturation and resistance to acculturation. Oonk discusses this issue of change in the diaspora culture:

> This long-standing relationship resulted in a particular 'East African Asian culture in which Gujarati (Indian), Swahili (East African) and European cultures were adapted, transformed, and re-invented. The migration of Asians from one continent to another, where they became a minority, resulted in the development of various strategies of adaptation, with the group adopting new socio-cultural values while maintaining some of their original values. (68)

It did not take long for the Lall children to understand their parents conservatism and resistance to change in spite of their modern vision. When Deepa objected to marrying Dilip – "a U.K. graduate, a handsome boy, of good caste and family" and said she would marry whom she wanted to, the reaction of her father was sharp: "We are not Europeans, remember that, we are desis, Indians. Proud Indians, we have our

customs, and we marry with the permission and blessings of our parents! You will do as you are told, girl!" (174). Parent arranged marriages are traditional in Indian culture. Deepa, the lovely daughter of the Lall family has to get married with an Indian; the reverse was out of the question.

Vikram, who well knew the social boundaries of his culture, was anxious but in contrast to Deepa:

> She did not seem to understand the seriousness of her offence … to the values of our times and people. We did not marry blacks or whites, or low-castes or Muslims; there were other restrictions, too subtle for us the younger generation to follow; Hindu Punjabis were the strong preference always. Times were changing, certainly, but Deepa in her typical impulsive way had leaped ahead of them. (175)

Vassanji reinforces the continuing theme of the inseparable gulf between the Asians and both the whites and the blacks when he gets Deepa to even dare to imply the possibility of getting married with Njoroge: "And what's wrong with it, we don't live in colonial times anymore, on in your India-desh, this is a new Africa. Don't say that! Mother wailed. She looked devastated" (178). The argument at home was highlighted the power of the cultural norms of the Indian society in Africa. Father Lall reminded her seriously once more the limits of an Indian girl,

> Get this in your head, Deepa, he is an African. He is not us. Not even in your wildest dreams can you marry an African.
> What do you mean? What's wrong with an African? I am an African. What hypocrisy! …
> Mother took a deep breath and replied, There's nothing wrong with being an African or Asian or European. But they can't mix. It doesn't work. (178-179)

The intolerance for the other was far more than what Deepa and also Vikram thought. Vikram defined this excessiveness as the "fear of the unknown" (179). That is to say, this abnormal reaction could only be explained as 'xenophobia' – an

excessive fear of foreigners – towards the Africans, which is actually a colonial heritage due to the racialist attitudes.

In addition, there had always been a racial enmity between African-Asians and indigenous Africans. Mrs Sharma, Deepa's future mother-in-law, counselled her; "I knew that African must have forced himself on you. Don't you know, they've had eyes on us all along, on us and our business" (198).

Intermarriage was unacceptable in the social norms of Indian Diaspora. The idea of half-breeds, of not being able to talk to your grandchildren in your own tongue was intolerable. It was not hard to empathise with Vikram's Mother; she would be "the talk of the Indian community in the whole of East Africa and be subjected to the contempt of other women, who would say she had a pukka kalu for a damad. Even in the temple in front of these women she would feel discomfort, what's more, her dream of going to Delhi with her children and their families would fade away" (205).

In spite of the strict and unwritten rules of the Indian Diaspora Deepa went on seeing Njoroge. It was 1960s East Africa and Kenya was undergoing a dramatic transformation; relationships between the cultures were not a taboo anymore, but only to an extent of course. However Deepa could not predict the things that would happen. Deepa's plan to see Njoroge in Dar es Salaam was not a total success. They forgot that even though they were foreigners in this city and had no community to abstain from, they were still an unacceptable couple. Maybe they had run away from their society but what they missed was the fact that escaping from a racial identity is impossible since one cannot hide it.

The meeting of friends in "the land of not yet" seemed like a great plan but they should have guessed that they as a group of four – Deepa, Njoroge, Vikram, and his girl friend Yasmin – would be found offensive by some groups. One night Deepa and Vikram were attacked by six youths who spoke a mixture of Cutchi (an Indian language spoken in Gujarat) and Swahili, "that Tanzanian specialty" (208). They were surrounded by these angry men when a white Mercedes appeared and saved their life, otherwise "what awaited was only the kill" (208). According to what Vikram understood from the things they said, those attackers had known him and most likely seen his sister. Lall explains the reason of these men's anger: "I, a Nairobi Punjabi Hindu, was dating one of their girls; to make matters worse, I had a sister who was going out in the open with an African" (208). Consequently, that was another traumatic lesson on not to defy social rules or in other words the impossibility of ignoring them.

Vassanji continues driving home this message. Things were turning worse for Deepa and Njoroge no matter how hard they tried. Njoroge's visit to Deepa's Mother to pay his condolences for her father changed the life of the two of them. She was about to leave for temple when Njoroge arrived. "If he had been a minute late, she would have missed him" (213), but there he was. Mother Lall knowing that this was her one and only chance, both forbid and pleaded with Njoroge to leave her daughter,

> William, Njoroge, I forbid you to see my daughter in the way you have been seeing her. You have been like a son to us, she is your sister.
>
> But Mother, he began.
>
> No. no, I say. I have no one in the world except my brother and my children. I want you to understand that. I have lost my home in Pakistan. I have no cousins or uncles or aunts, no parents. At least let me have a normal family, where I can see my grandchildren grow up as Indians, as Hindus. I had dreams too, of children and grandchildren

> – whom I can understand, can speak to … and bring up in our ways. I have nothing against Africans. But we are different. You are a brother to my son and daughter, you are their best friend. But a husband for Deepa – no, Njoroge.
>
> The world is different, Mother, he said, but she didn't reply, simply stared at him with her large grief-stricken eyes.
>
> I have a lot of opportunities in this country, Mrs Lall … Mother … a lot of exciting times ahead will help to heal my hurt. But Deepa – she's a girl – you'll break her heart, Mother. You will never be able to give her happiness your way.
>
> I said I forbid you, but no, I go down on my knees and beg you. Please. Let her go!
>
> Her voice ending in a whisper, there was nothing he could reply to that. He drew a deep breath. They embraced, and he left. (214)

It is not hard to empathise with Mother Lall who was suffering deeply; she had lost her roots with her homeland and her people – her father had died. She only had her children in this life who belonged to this foreign land. She was aware that she had to create a home here in Kenya but she only knew the Indian way of doing so. She wanted to keep Deepa safe and not to lose her. For Mother, Deepa and Njoroge could not have a future so she ended this relationship for the sake of Deepa's happiness. However, Deepa left home in despair.

Vikram brought her back home but the headstrong young girl seemed buried somewhere deep in Deepa. She accepted the marriage with Dilip, the son of Hari Sharma, and everything in her life continued in the proper Indian way. She became an important figure in the Kenyan Indian Diaspora with her two children, husband, and work life. However one day the passionate woman returned from the dead and a secret relationship between the old lovers started with, at first, the most innocent feelings.

Meena Auntie and Harry Uncle had to leave the country as they could no longer bear the rumours about their daughter-in-law. Deepa was behaving improperly

according to Asian customs; a married woman could not have a close male friend. The last photograph was a proof of everything; Njoroge was shot in Deepa's pharmacy while they were alone and the photo on the front pages of the papers brought shame on the family. Soon after Njoroge's murder Dilip also died in a car accident. At Dilip's funeral, her mother-in-law talked about her as "that whore" who was responsible of her son's death.

The social pressure was unbelievable and humiliating: "In Nairobi Deepa couldn't be seen at Asian functions without being made to feel embarrassed" (337). Aber Cohen in his article, *Cultural Strategies in the Organization of Trading Diasporas* states that the Diaspora society, "tends to be autonomous in its judicial organisation. Its members form a moral community which constrains the behaviour of the individual and ensures a large measure of conformity with common values and principles" (83). "On one occasion, at a qawali concert, she had been spat at" (Vassanji 337). She started wearing sari after Dilip's death, "to present an appropriately sombre appearance to a keenly watchful Asian public" (338).

Mother Lall was probably the most affected person by Deepa's loss but also the shadow beneath it. Vikram wrote; "mother was ultimately sorry for causing Deepa the unbearable pain that almost took her away from us, the unhappiness from which we all knew my sister never recovered" (340). The times were changing and mother's feeling of guilt was deepening, "interracial marriage did not appear as offensive as before" (340). Mother Lall tried hard to make Kenya her home but unfortunately could not.

She died six months after Dilip. Father after her death was "a sailor lost at sea without a compass or a destination" (341). He was an old lonely man, Vikram and

Deepa had also left the country. Father had to set up a new life to survive; he started going to the temple. That was his way of coming to terms with himself and remembering Mother. The most striking change in his life was the fact that he was now living with an African woman, which is a completely contradictory action when Father's life perspective and strong Indianness considered. Things once unacceptable or a taboo in this diasporic culture are now allowable. In the end, it is the father who seeks sanction from his son,

> She is a comfort to me and looks after me. Do you think it's wrong of me? A man gets lonely … Is it wrong, son?
> He desperately craves approval, acknowledgement – a lonely old man who wants to be loved. All I can do is tell him, You did the right thing, Papa. There's nothing wrong with it. You have to go on living, Mother would understand that. (369-370)

To summarise, the diaspora member tries hard to keep a collective memory with the people in his homeland despite the distance. Knowing that a complete acceptance by the host country would be impossible, the maintenance of the relations with the country of origin becomes the only way not to get lost in an unknown land. However the image of the homeland is usually an idealised one and the immigrant actually knows that there is nowhere to go, no way to return. So there is no other way forward but to make his new land look like a place that he can call home.

As a conclusion, living in a 'Diaspora' is one of the main reasons of in-betweenness and it causes great suffering for the ones who experience it. The person who is dispersed from his native land – voluntarily or involuntarily – ends up with a paradoxical, hybrid identity. The reason of this ambivalence is an inevitable result of the dilemma of 'belonging' and 'alienation'.

2.2. The Mau Mau Movement - Violence as Catharsis

Some details of the Mau Mau rebellion and its suppression at the hands of the British colonisers are apropos to position the novel in the time of its political setting. In the opening lines of his 2005 book, *Histories of the Hanged: The Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* scholar David Anderson writes:

> Mau Mau was the great horror story of Britain's empire in the 1950s. The battle to suppress the revolt in Kenya was presented as a war between savagery and civilisation, a rebellion made by men who could not cope with modernity, who reached back into depraved, tribal past in an effort to stop the wheel of progress from turning. (1)

These are, in a sense, sentences that come almost 50 years too late. They contrast starkly with the image presented in Robert Ruark's novel, *Something of Value*, published in 1955, the most widely read and best-known account of the Mau Mau uprising, which warned his readers: "To understand Africa you must understand a basic impulsive savagery that is greater than anything we civilised people have encountered in two centuries" (qtd. in Anderson 1).

Before Mau Mau, Kenya was a land greatly attractive to white settlers; it was a 'white man's country'. Anderson states that Kenya was "a Mecca for the English middle classes" and quotes from Elspeth Huxley's diary, another well known book about Kenya:

> To own a bit of this virgin country; to make a house, and still more, a garden in which you can mingle all the beauties of Western and tropical flowers; to have a part share in this thrilling sunlight; to have cheap, apparently reverential, impersonal labour; to feel the sense of singularity, of enhanced personality that comes from having a white skin among dark millions. (qtd. in Anderson 79)

This imperialist paradise did not, however, last long and the obedient servants of this land of opportunities rebelled against their White masters and their Black collaborators. Anderson depicts the atmosphere of early 1950s,

> [T]he old European empires were running out of steam … the once mighty imperial powers were contracting. Britain had already given up India and Pakistan, and Palestine had been sacrificed for the establishment of the Jewish state. In South-east Asia, a guerilla war was rumbling on against communist insurgents, but the British were already planning the hand-over of power, to a compliant, conservative Malay government, that would take place in 1956. Nationalism was on the march. Empires were in threat. This was the new order of the post-war world. (2)

Decolonisation movements were slower in Africa than other colonial territories in the world. Still, wars or one kind or another "were eventually fought in all the larger settler colonies – in Algeria, Angola and Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and even in the non-colony, South Africa" (6). In Kenya, the power imbalance expressed so idyllically by Huxley above, the White greed for land taken from the Blacks, was the impetus for rebellion. Under the colonial rule conditions were so harsh for Africans that there was no other option but to revolt. The poverty, the ill-treatment of tenants, and the problem of land hunger in contrast to the enormous wealth and prosperity of the White settlers, and the so-called 'loyalist' sympathisers or collaborators, provoked fierce attacks and the Mau Mau War.

Naturally, the colonisers portrayed the uprising in a completely different light. For them, the Mau Mau was an interruption to the civilising mission of the British in Kenya. Moreover, the facts of the brutality of the attempted suppression were swept under the rug by the coloniser before leaving the country. Caroline Elkins calls attention to the missing files about the Mau Mau case in the official colonial records despite the fact that the British had always been the 'meticulous

record keepers'. She states, "the colonial government had intentionally destroyed many of these missing files in massive bonfires on the eve of its retreat from Kenya" (xii). According to Anderson's book, more than 1800 African civilians were murdered by Mau Mau and many hundreds disappeared while only 32 Europeans were killed (4-5). The number of the Mau Mau rebels killed during the emergency is, according to official records, 12,000 but the real number is more than 20,000, 1090 of whom were hanged (7). At least 150,000 – or likely more – were kept in detention camps during the rebellion (5).

M.G. Vassanji in his novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* demonstrates how this bloody independence struggle had an impact on the lives of many Kenyans irrespective of their colour. Vikram explains that the emergence of Mau Mau changed the lives of every man who lives on the Kenya lands. The threat and feeling of insecurity was palpable: "It was the nights that curdled the blood, that made palpable the terror that permeated our world like a mysterious ether" (41). It was impossible for Vikram, who was eight years old then, to understand the things happening around him.

It took time for the White settlers of Kenya to understand the Mau Mau. The real reasons beneath the peasants' revolt had never been taken into consideration. For them it was 'a basic impulsive savagery' of blacks, especially the Kikuyu – a Black ethnic group. They little expected that it would turn out to be a civil war. At first, they were not expecting any violent attacks on whites but the slaughter of a white family forced the colonists to consider the realities; the white settlers were not wanted on these lands where they behaved as 'parasites in paradise' as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o labels them (qtd. in Anderson 79). Kenyan's European community wanted

revenge on the Africans. On the other hand, the situation for the Asian community was completely different to that of the Africans. The colonial administration sequestered Asians into service against the uprising. Asians took shooting lessons and worked as the Home Guard patrols in their area. In the beginning, the Home Guard unit was kind of a 'Dad's Army' set up by the African landed elite and Asians for personal security but later they "became a militia, given authority to act in assistance of the police and army" (Anderson 124). Vikram's father was one of them.

The revolt and its effects were something unavoidable during these days. There were official raids even in the Indian residential areas, under the expectation of finding Mau Mau hiding among the servants. The English officers during these raids treated Asian in a more friendly and kind manner:

> How are you, kem-ché, namaskar, salaam – you can never be too careful with the terrorists, this is for the safety of you and yours. Remember, even the most trusted boy can turn against you with a panga (makes a chopping gesture with a hand) if he has taken the Mau Mau oath, so you must report anything suspicious. Don't hire Kikuyu. Safeguard your guns, get proper training in shooting, even the women, yes, you too, madam, and you, sir, have you installed your alarm…(Vassanji 33)

According to the officers any Black man could be a Mau Mau who had taken an oath – an alliance, loyalty to the struggle for an independent Black Kenya. Askaris searched all the area for anything suggestive of possible Mau Mau ritual to show their superiors. They did not even need reasonable cause to arrest a Kikuyu as a Mau Mau suspect. "An ebony walking stick, a banana leaf, a newspaper with a picture of Jomo Kenyatta on the front, a sheepskin-covered Bible, a bicycle pump, a half-eaten joint of beef in a porcelain bowl" (33) virtually anything could very well be taken as enough evidence to convict an African of being a Mau Mau.

> … the police were perpetually on the search for those who had taken the oath and especially for those who had administered it. … the suspects - for all black men were suspect – were pushed and jostled, slapped for replying, kicked in the behind for tardiness. I watched the gardener, Njoroge's grandfather Mwangi, pick himself up from the ground with a wince. He was a short, stout man with a strongly lined face and some grey in his hair, a dignified man who always moved and spoke with deliberation. How could these men and women we knew, who spoke softly and served us gently, who held our hands and looked after us when we were left in their care, be the dreaded Mau Mau? How could Mzee Mwangi, with the worry lines on his forehead and holes in his ears and a front tooth missing, be one of those killers who stalked the nights? … He would sometimes call Deepa over and silently put in her hair a white and pink champeli flower plucked from our tree. I wanted to call out to them and say, Polé sana, I am your friend, I trust you all. (31-32)

It was hard for Vikram as a child to give meaning to what he saw; the man who was shoved by the African askaris and English officers was the very man that made their wooden toys so diligently and lovingly. Vassanji makes a number of points by detailing such occurrences from the perspective of children. Firstly, it highlights the callousness of the adult behaviour, the direct outcome of colonialism, in which the desire to preserve the status quo of unbalanced power relations, the master-slave paradigm, causes men to commit acts of violence in front of children. Secondly, it serves to explain the deep-rootedness of ambivalent identities. Vassanji is asking, what hope do children have growing up in such an environment?

Whether a Mau Mau or not, Mwangi died in prison where he was taken as a suspect. He was said to have committed suicide. Everyone knew that it was not the case, but it was only Mahesh Uncle who dared voice it: "What, killed himself – tortured to death, more likely. Do you see the dignified, proud Mwangi killing himself? For what?" (135). Everyone in Kenya knew the situation in prisons and detention camps but they preferred to keep silent. The suspects taken into detention

were kept outdoors in the cold and rain, surrounded by barbed wire, taunted, beaten, tortured and threatened by the police. They were frequently forced into confessing belonging to the Mau Mau.

European settlers in Kenya needed public support inside and outside the country to resist the Mau Mau and protect their status in the colony and image all around the world. They reflected it as a rebellion to civilisation. Stories of the dreadful Mau Mau travelled around the world. Vikram narrates the atmosphere:

> The Mau Mau are your enemies, they will kill and maim your family and children, they perform bestial rites and orgies under the cover of night in the homes of their sworn supporters, one of whom could well be your Kikuyu servant in his room. A pamphlet was distributed by the government. It was in Swahili and illustrated with pictures of purported Mau Mau doings. Two of them seared my young mind then, have become unforgettable. In one, a naked African child of about four lay curled on the ground, in a posture of sleep; the neck abruptly drooped down, and at its back, the only disfiguration on the smooth body, a black inky smudge with thick bristly protrusions like crawling worms. It took a few days of brooding over and compulsive starting at the picture in secret, eventually through a stamp collector's magnifying glass, for the realisation to catch hold that those were not worms on the back of the child's head but broken ends of the skin, bone, and muscle, all the exposed tissues of a neck hacked by a panga. In the other picture, a girl of about six, also naked, lay bent over a log; there were short panga slash marks on her calves; there was no head on the body, it lay about a foot away. The panga had cut away part of an ear, this I remember too. (42)

Vassanji uses imagery to further the point. Another government warning in the form of a pamphlet reminding people to keep their weapons safe from the terrorists contained "a drawing of a devilish black man with large eyes and open mouth, leaping out of the yellow page, under the caption: The Mau Mau want your gun!" (53).

For Vikram, another grievous memory from the days of the Emergency was the capture of their servant. When the Lall family found out that Papa's gun was

missing, they were obliged to report it to the police. Mr. Lall was frightened; there was a stiff fine for losing a gun and there could be stiffer repercussions. Amini, Lall's servant, was weeping and terrified. He resolutely denied stealing the weapon. Mother looked frantic, but who else could have stolen it? "Were there Mau Mau among the servants, after all? Amini was a Muslim, from Mombasa; he would not have taken the oath. Still, how was one to tell?" (75). Indeed, Amini was innocent but the police came and took him and ten more as the house servants were always the prime suspect.

> We never saw Amini again. … None of us, not even Papa , was really convinced that he was guilty, even though the police said he was half-Kikuyu and a likely suspect. But if Amini didn't steal the gun, who did? Both my parents were troubled by the question. Papa was fined seventy-five pounds for losing the weapon plus ammunition, and received a reprimand even from the *Nakuru Times*, which ones again questioned the wisdom of letting the Indians carry guns. (76)

When the oath Njoroge administered to Vikram is considered, it had to be almost impossible that Mwangi, or any other Kikuyu could have avoided taking the oath, even though it is not easy for Lall to accept. "Was the benign-looking, elderly Mwangi, the wise patient man, the dignified gardener, anything other than that? I mean was he secretly involved with the Mau Mau, in its violence? I could never bring myself to believe that" (95).

The murder of the Bruces is presented as a typical Mau Mau murder, and a tragedy for Vikram: "The couple were beaten and hacked to death downstairs. The gang went upstairs to the children's bedrooms. Bill had been brave, the newspapers said, and put up resistance. Annie had tried to hide" (130). There were no pictures of the dead bodies as papers found them too gruesome to publish. The only picture in the newspaper from that bloody night was of Annie's teddy bear – cut to shreds.

Another picture next to it was Bill's, at the age of three, sitting on the shoulders of Khika, the house servant of Bruces. Khika was the prime suspect but he had disappeared after the murders. Khika had been responsible for the care of the children. Vikram remembered him with his caring attitudes towards Bill and Annie.

Vikram never recovered from the trauma of his friends' murder, nor the contradictory emotions resulting from the seemingly contradictory behaviour of the adults around him. For a child, the knowledge that a kind and caring man such as Mwangi or Mahesh Uncle was involved in a such brutal behaviour are things unable to be associated together. "They hurt not only at the thought of what happened to those children but also for what remains in me, the stain I cannot erase" (307).

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon argues that in the cause of a struggle for independence violence is "the perfect mediation". The colonised man liberates himself in and through violence" (44). Sartre in his preface to Fanon's book writes that "this irrepressible violence is neither a storm in a tea cup nor the re-emergence of savage instincts nor even a consequence of resentment: it is a man reconstructing himself" (lv). Such claims paint merciless acts in a positive light, and argue that they have their roots in the unfair treatment and rule of colonialism.

> At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonised of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence. (2004: 51)

Vassanji's point of view is more nuanced. The central theme of ambivalence, and its all-pervasiveness throughout the novel, clearly visible as a motivating agent in all the major characters, argues for a more complex notion of colonialism and anti-

colonialism than that of simplistic dichotomy: coloniser and colonised, master and slave, good and bad, us and them.

2.3. Political Turmoil with the Independence

"On the night of 12 December [1963], the union Jack was finally hauled down as Kenya's black, red, green, and white flag was hoisted, ending sixty-odd years of colonial rule" (77) writes Ogude in the book, *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya*. However, just as it had not been easy for Africans to witness sixty years of colonial rule, it was also not easy to witness the aftermath of it. Before the white man stepped on the Kenyan lands, it was a multicultural country with peoples from many different races, Africans, Arabs, Asians and so on, somewhat "like the American nation, made up of strangers, both adventurers and refugees" (qtd. in Ogude and Ochieng xiv). Later, Europeans occupied the land and the top of the colonial economic, political, and social pyramid even though they made up only a minor portion in the population: "Although there were only 61,000 Europeans in 1960 – compared with 169,000 Asians and 7,8 million Africans – about 40 per cent of the total wage-bill of that year accrued to them" (Ogude and Ochieng xv). In addition, they dominated the best professions and positions in the country. Asians were the second privileged group:

> They owned a large part of small-scale agricultural and industrial production; handled the bulk of retail and wholesale trade throughout the country; manned middle-level and clerical posts in the civil service; operated most of the transport and construction in business; and provided skilled and semi-skilled labour. (Ogude and Ochieng xv)

At the bottom of the social and economic pyramid were the native Africans, the majority of whom worked in farming as peasants in Kenya's rural areas.

With the emergence of African working class and educated hybrid group in towns, the legitimacy of colonialism started to be questioned which led Kenya to its independence in 1964. This small group of educated native Africans, called the 'petty-bourgeois', evolved into an African capitalist class during the decolonisation era. "In the period between 1960 and 1963 – with independence in sight – the configuration of Kenya's class society had begun to markedly transform, with political power gradually shifting into the hands of the African petty bourgeoisie" (Ogude and Ochieng xvii). That is to say, it was only a pseudo-departure of the colonials:

> Thus, independent Kenya inherited the colonial economic structures and classes. During the short period of independence these structures and classes would undergo raid transformations – disintegration of some, formation of others and new realignments. (Ogude and Ochieng xvii).

M.G. Vassanji sets his novel in that age of political turmoil and places his protagonist Vikram Lall in the middle of the events. Vikram describes the newborn Kenya after independence;

> The year was 1965 and Kenya had finally achieved independence. Great changes had taken place … Jomo Kenyatta, former political prisoner, was president and father of the nation and his portrait had taken the place of Queen in every shop and office … The country's freedom had come as a personal boon to [Father Lall] as it had done to many others. (141)

Those places where once only Europeans were allowed to enter opened their doors to all races. Everything was changing, names, places, ownership, government positions, property, and even the clothes were changing hands – 'or bodies' (142).

> European settlers and civil servants were departing, leaving for easy pickings their homes in the posher areas of the city. Indian civil servants were abandoning to the unfriendly market their properties in modest Eastleigh, which African cooperatives were quickly buying

> up. International visitors arrived in droves, sporting sun wear and cheerful optimism, and if they were not tourists, they needed rental housing. (142-3)

The political atmosphere of the country promised new changes. The newly independent Kenya was a very suitable environment for those desiring to make a fortune, as long as they played their cards right; this was the view of not only Father Lall and many Indians but also the Africans. However, Asians need to be far more careful: “Sensitivities ran high in the country, the humiliations of the colonial rule still smarted; you could be denounced and deported as a racist almost overnight” (142).

Vikram began to overcome his former naivety to open his eyes to the realities of the word. “Kenyatta our leader had forgiven the sins of the past and we were all citizens of a new multiracial, democratic nation” (144). However, there was confusion and bitterness for the returning Mau Mau fighters and political detainees who were now labelled ‘former’ freedom fighters. Indeed, they were only asking for the compensation that was promised to them (155).

> [They] had found that their confiscated lands had been turned over in their absence to government collaborators, some of whom were now influential in the new government; the African cooperatives set up to buy land from the white settlers needed loans and the prices demanded were under dispute. (149)

The situation for these former freedom fighters was deplorable:

> “mostly middle aged retired guerrillas who had once given up all to live in the forests, to rule the nights, to draw blood and terrorize in the name of freedom, and to suffer and risk death for themselves; who with homemade guns and machetes had sorely tested the military might of British, thus hastening independence. (155)

But they did not look like heroes now, nor did they receive a hero’s welcome; instead they were reduced to pleading (155).

Njoroge, who had a deep sympathy and admiration for the former freedom fighters, did not want to see that the greedy new African bourgeoisie class were completely unwilling to share the cake with the freedom fighters. He was one of few who spoke up on the behalf of freedom fighters against the government of Jomo. Freedom fighters were becoming impatient; almost every day a disturbance by former Mau Mau was reported and they were arrested and taken to court.

> Some of the intransigent among the former Mau Mau had resorted to banditry in the townships and when captured had been sentenced to heavy jail terms, ironically by the same judges who would pronounce similar harsh punishments on suspected Mau Mau before independence. Not long ago Mau Mau General Mwariama had been sentenced to a stiff jail term for brandishing a sword stick and causing disturbance; General Baimunge was captured and paraded naked in Meru townships. (156)

The new independent country, not only had difficult matters to deal with inside the country but also outside. Vikram was watching the world from Dar es Salaam – an in-between land between the two regions.

> Momentous political changes had recently taken place in Tanganyika. These had followed the independence of Zanzibar and the bloody and communist-inspired coup less than a month later that sent shivers throughout East Africa. That revolution on the small and torpid isle was the flash that signalled anew tense reality in our region; the shape of politics, and of much else, in east Africa was never the same again. Our lives would be forever affected, because we had caught the interest of the world's great powers and become pawns in their ongoing Cold War. Tanganyika and Zanzibar became Tanzania, and while the old dream of an East African Federation still merited passing mention, its truth had disappeared like vapour in the harsh sunlight of Dar es Salaam, and we were left with three countries more at odds than ever before. The rhetoric in Tanzania was increasingly anti-imperialist; in Kenya, anticommunist. (182)

The 1970s were turbulent and somewhat out of control times for Kenya. Decolonization was not an easy phenomenon for Kenyans to deal with. In *The*

Wretched of the Earth Fanon, who focus on the complex problems of decolonisation, warns 'young nations' against nationalism:

> National consciousness is nothing but a crude, empty fragile shell. The cracks in it explain how easy it is for young independent countries to switch back from state to tribe – a regression which is so terribly detrimental and prejudicial to the development of the nation and national unity. (97)

Homi Bhabha, in his foreword to *The Wretched of the Earth*, refers to this shallow consciousness as "narrow-minded nationalism" because it cannot go beyond racism. He opines that "if nationalism is not explained, enriched, and deepened, if it does not very quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into humanism, then it leads to a dead-end" (144).

Nevertheless, Kenya after the colonialism had many ethnic and racial conflicts. Independence brought many opportunities to the young country but corruption alongside. Albert Memmi, whilst discussing the reasons of failure during the decolonisation process, defines corruption as a "shameful and disguised" (8) cause as it "expresses and helps maintain the breakdown of the social fabric" (9) and "prevents the formation of a qualified middle class" (11). In Vassanji's novel, his protagonist Vikram Lall is a 'resigned victim' of this infectious disease of his time. As Memmi puts it: "Corruption is universal and affects everything and everyone, including the young, who receive a handful of reassuring crumbs and are complicit, complacent, or resigned victims" (8). Vassanji insightfully describes the corrupted atmosphere of the new Kenya through the voice of Vikram:

> the British and the Europeans vacating lucrative farms and businesses and well-paying jobs, foreign aid and loans promising contracts and kickbacks; this was a time to make it, once and for all, as a family, as a clan, as a tribe – the stakes were mountain-high. And this in the tinderbox Cold War climate of the period, foreign governments

> peddling influence, bribes, arms. Many of the newly powerful had never been in close proximity to such authority before, such organization, such influence, such access to wealth as had become possible. From pit-latrine to palace, was how one foreign journalist crassly described these changes in fortune; he was quickly deported. But his fault was more his limited imagination; if I say that by the end of that decade it would be possible for a politician to own a real estate on the French Riviera or interests in Manhattan, I would be closer to the truth. Money and power were all around me, the one dizzying and glamorous, the other intimidating and coercive, and the two often went together. (235)

Kenya, like many other new African countries, became the centre of attraction for European companies, which was merely a new way for colonisation to continue in a different form: neo-colonialism – a term only first recorded in 1952 ("neo-colonialism"). The newly empowered Africans were flattered by this overseas attention. Vikram reveals the level of relations with their foreign business dealers: "We don't mind friendly generous gestures from our richer friends, PS Olentude had more than once reminded us at the office, but we make our business decisions with a clam and studied neutrality" (246). They had meals in which wine and beer flowed freely with people from the firms that were seeking business. White women were used as enticements: "White women were even then, some years after independence, the exotic forbidden fruit, and reputedly freer in their manners than our own local girls" (247).

Sophia, an Italian beautiful white woman, was one such woman offered skilfully to Vikram during a business deal with Italians. She was what Vikram got for his portion. However, Vikram, who was new and naïve to the business world and not yet corrupt, rejected the proposal of the company and as a result lost Sophia. Vikram was deeply hurt and humiliated: "It seemed that everyone in the office was aware of my situation, looked up and down at this smart young bureaucrat who had been taken

for a ride by the Italians. Had I been so utterly toyed with? Was Sophia no more than an expensive prostitute, who had been used in an attempt to buy me?" (250).

Kenya was having hard times; the utopia of a multicultural rich young African country was not working, even the native Africans had conflicts. The highlighted differences of the ethnical groups during the colonial times were still clouding the country's present and future.

> We lived in compartmentalized society; every evening from the melting pot of city life each person went his long way home to his family, his church, his folk. To the Kikuyu, the Luo were the crafty, rebellious eggheads of Lake Victoria, the Masai backward naked nomads. The Meru prided themselves on being special, having descended from some wandering Semitic tribe. There were the Dorobo, the Turkana, the Boran, the Somali, the Swahili, each also different from the other. And there were the Wahindi – the wily Asians who were not really African. (267)

The lessons of life taught Vikram that he would never have a way to escape his racial identity; he would always carry the suspicion of being an Asian, the Shylock.

Vikram got a promotion to personal assistant for Minister Paul Nderi. It was a chance in a lifetime, to be high up in the inner circle sounded exciting and promising. Even though Vikram was aware of the dangers, he believed in himself; "But this is Vikram Lall, remember – I am the least political person you know. *I survive*" (251). According to David Anderson, such an attitude was characteristic of the Asian people in Kenya, most of them "believed that economic survival required political silence" (9). During the story in the novel, Vassanji narrates Vikram's turning into a typical Indian stereotype - a bright withdrawn Indian - despite his nature. The men who were up in the higher circles had other plans for Vikram. They were impressed by his self-control, once his boss said, "I wish I were as cold as you are … You are the quite quite the Frigidaire aren't you?" (256).

Vikram, was the perfect Asian African the government needed. The communists were a great danger for the country according to the 'African elite'. Precautions needed to be taken against the communists otherwise the banks and private property would be nationalised which would not make the upper crust happy. There was money flowing from Moscow and Peking to the coffers of the opposition. On the other hand, there was also the money donated by well-wishers abroad: "bribes – foreign interference, American imperialism" (257). Vikram became a money launderer for the government. He was to keep the track of the accounts and supply money for different constituencies who needed money for their operations. However, he had to use his Indian contacts to do this job and do his job in total secrecy. Vikram was planning to quit after his first job but he could never clean his hands from the dirt of green dollars. Thanks to his Indian connections he had no problem dealing with the money. However, the lure of corruption was difficult to ignore.

> One day the two Americans told me there were ten thousand dollars extra in the briefcase. Let's face it, said Jim, the job is risky even if it is above board – these are what we call campaign funds, all politicians need them. They are the grease that smoothes the democratic process. Now as our token of gratitude we would like you to keep the extra ten thousand.
>
> I refused, saying I was only the minister's minion.
>
> In the future I would know better, for that ten thousand surely didn't end up in a worthier pocket. (261)

Eventually Vikram adventitiously discovered that the largest recipient of the grants which he was dealing with was no other than his boss, Paul Nderi. This was a big shock for him. At first he thought Paul might be using the money for the political activities he was involved in, but the picture became clearer when his fortune was taken into consideration.

The harder Vikram tried to keep himself outside the corruption, the deeper he was sinking into the mire.

> I was doing well in my job with Paul Nderi; the salary was modest, in accordance with government schedules, but the Christmas bonuses from Paul, in thick flabby envelopes, were hugely generous, and I could hardly refuse the car and house allowance he gave me. One day in my absence the two Americans Jim and Gerald left a thick manila envelope full of hard currency at my home as a present for Shobha's birthday and I let her convince me to put the sum aside for a rainy day, just in case. Perhaps I was influenced by my boss Paul Nderi's cold calculations. Once he had uttered an aphorism: If you don't take it, someone will; but if you take it, my friend, at least you could do some good.
>
> How right that sounds.
>
> Total corruption, I've been told, occurs in inches and proceeds through veils of ambiguity. (271)

Of course, it is politic for those engaged in corruption to make sure their staff were also involved, thereby ensuring that they cannot become whistleblower without incriminating themselves. Vikram's bosses employed the same logic. They could not let Vikram stay clean in that environment otherwise he would be more dangerous. Gradually, Vikram lost the control of his life; he got deeply involved in a way he could hardly imagine, so that, in the end, the sums lost all importance. Years later, trying to answer how he had swindled that much money, remarked that "you can play poker with penny chips or million dollar chips, the game is the same" (271).

Nevertheless, knowing the President in person and being in the higher circles of Kenya had its privileges, which Vikram learned to use. Once his father was asked to hand over his business to an African: "It was not unheard of for petty politicians – and some not so petty ones – to force out Asians from their businesses through sheer intimidation" (281). The telephone call that Vikram made that afternoon from his

father's office illuminates the system of corruption and racism that existed in Kenya in those days.

> I telephoned Ogwell's patron. We are the citizens of this country, I told him, the business is legal, it cannot be simply taken over. By what authority, may I ask?
>
> I could not keep the nervous edge from my voice; you do not normally take on a politician in our country.
>
> The man actually screamed at me: You cannot talk to me like this, you Indian! I will have you deported tomorrow!
>
> Simple blackmail. But I played through my gambit. I replied calmly, I have recourse to the courts of law and constitution, to defend my father's business and his rights.
>
> Brashly the man replied, You try it, my friend, you will not even reach a hundred feet near to the court –
>
> I said in that case I will speak to Mzee himself.
>
> There was no answer … the party at the other end put the phone down with a click. Peter Ogwell walked away, never to be seen again. (281)

Ochieng argues that "the highly personal style of government which Kenyatta's unique position created could be justified as giving confidence and stability to the new state, but to some it began to look as though the old colonial power had simply transformed itself into one where Kenyatta was a new style Governor and Kikuyu had replaced the Europeans as the top dogs" (106).

Vassanji questions, through Vikram, the unfairness of this 'compartmentalized world' even after colonialism. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon argues that by looking at "the immediacies of the colonial context, it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to" (5). Vassanji also deals with these issues:

> Can such power reside in one man? Was this the only way to get justice for a minority? Then only the well-positioned among them could gain access to it. And the others? The Africans? If you were not connected, through communal allegiances, even penniless you were protected and favoured. Otherwise, suspicion and intimidation could make a victim of anyone. Try as a coastal man to open a pub in

> Nakuru or as a Luo to look for a job in Nyeri. But we Asians were special: we were brown, we were few and frightened and caricatured, and we could be threatened with deportation as aliens even if we had been in the country since the time of Vasco da Gama and before some of the African people had even arrived in land.
>
> This abhorring of a people, holding them in utter contempt, blaming them for your misfortunes – trying to get rid of them en masse – could and did have other manifestations on our continent. Idi Amin cleansed Uganda of his entire Asian population by deporting them, and many African leaders applauded him. Little did they know what a slippery slope it was from that move from genocide in Rwanda, and then elsewhere. Now in Nakuru, the place of my childhood, it is the Kikuyu who have become the unwanted exploiter-demons, and on the Internet the MuKenya Patriots vow, if not revenge, then self-defence. (282)

It was again because of Vikram's race that the President disavowed him and used him as a scapegoat. Jomo, 'father' said him, "So you want me to fire one of my ministers for making a blunder. How will that look? Ministers are like wives, they do not get sacked. But you …" (301). That should not have come as a shock for Vikram as the political donations from generous Americans had already stopped.

However, nothing changed for Vikram when he started working with his in-laws; now he was the 'facilitator' who opened the doors which would otherwise remain shut for the Javeris. The Javeris were a typical Asian family,

> The mouse blows kisses as it nibbles away, was the Javeris' modus operandi. You ate and let others eat, was the more widely quoted adage of the day, to which all our city's business people subscribed. Bribes were extorted, offered, paid until they become casual as handshakes. My brother in-law Chand explained the situation this way, with his businessman's cynical humour and folksy wisdom: Bribes were a form of taxation; before the Europeans arrived, the Africans collected a tax called hongo which you paid if you passed through their area. Missionaries and explorers had all paid hongo in the past, having learned from the Swahili, Ukiwa na udhia, penyeza rupia: when in trouble, offer a dollar. A bribe today was simply hongo tax, payment for services rendered, or for permission to pass on unobstructed to the next stage for your enterprise. Since the government paid so little to its employees, they simply collected their

> own hongo, calling it "tea money." In most of the countries of the world, he claimed, people were used to paying this surcharge. (309)

Vikram was quick to learn how to open doors, but for big issues he usually consulted the Old Man, "For his abrupt and hurtful dismissal of me had come also a partial benediction, and an offer of lasting friendship" (309).

Vassanji continues his fictionalised exposé of corruption with the character of Mother Dottie. She was "the legendary predator python who, by simply drawing in her evil breath, could suck you in from afar and ingest you with her coils" (309) as Vikram described her, which meant Dilip was her new victim. It was certain that she got the power from the Father of the nation otherwise she could not be that powerful in the country. As well as being known as the principal dealer in the country's illegal ivory trade, she was also well known with her extortionist procedure of capturing companies which was called "sign on the Dottie line". When she called Dilip to engage in her business/extortion racket, it was a foregone conclusion that she could finish Dilip and so Mermaid Chemicals if he did not sign the agreement. There was no other way to solve this problem but to see the 'father' with a present,

> This is not good at all. They actually told him to sell his business, and at a tenth of its value? How greedy people get in our land …
>
> I suppressed a smile. It was not as if he was not aware of Mother Dottie's doings. It was just her bad luck that Dilip was my brother-in-law.
>
> He picked up his phone and asked for a line. When he was connected, he spoke to Julius, the lawyer-henchman of Mother Dottie.
>
> Julius, wewe, said Mzee. This, this Mermaid Chemicals … she is interested, but why? … And you have advised her so? … Huna adabu. You have no shame. They are an asset to our country; they export to Uganda, to Tanzania, to Ethiopia. Now what do you have to go and do your ushenzi for and harass them? Call this Muhindi – this Dilip – you tell him you are sorry, it was a mistake. Yes, a mistake …
>
> Thus the Old Man. Only he could do that. And I could have bet that Julius was shaking in his dripping wet pinstripe trousers at that very moment. (311)

This time a present from the in-laws was not enough, Vikram took a ten percent partnership in Mermaid as well, as a sign of Dilip's gratitude.

Vassanji details the mimicry of European institutions and styles in the new Kenya. Soon Vikram was on the President's New Year's Honours Lists and was awarded the Order of the Burning Spear while Mother Dottie got the Order of the Golden Heart, the country's highest honour. Shobha exulted in their new status as members of the country's elite. They were now in the invitation lists of garden parties at the embassies, dinners, and dances in the country. According to Ngũgĩ, the African bourgeoisie had adopted the cultural and social and practices of the European elite of colonial days; thus, the order of the day for them was "skin-lighteners, straightened hair, irrelevant drawing-room parties, conspicuous consumption" (qtd. in Ogude and Ochieng 142).

Gradually Vikram found himself the owner of Aladdin Finance Company. Lall tells the story; "One day the president of the National Bank called me up and told me overseas aid money had arrived for the drought-stricken northern district of the country, but it was in dollars and the Bank did not have enough shillings in hand to convert them in an emergency. Could I help" (313). The money was found in two days and in the following days the Bank bought some of the dollars back. So Aladdin Finance Company was founded because of a need. Lall confesses,

> I have not denied, when challenged, that our charges to the Bank in such instances have been high; I have argued, in reply, for the morality of the marketplace, adding moreover that our slippery local currency needs large commissions as a buffer to absorb dealers' risks. What I have not revealed, though obvious to anyone with a head, is that with every transaction a certain percentage worth of service charge – in other words, a bribe – was demanded in private by officials and was happily paid. (313-314)

It was a time when money was coming to the country in different forms but leaving it to private banks and investments in foreign countries but naturally "benefitting those it touched" (314). "All we had to do, my partners and I, was to pick up the cards and play" (345).

Vikram was not only serving the Kenyan elite but also many others around Africa with his company Aladdin Finance.

> There have been dozens of coups d'état in Africa. Every coup releases its share of unwanted flotsam-generals, prime ministers, presidents, politicians, widows, orphans with stashed-away millions and uncollected kickbacks that need assistance of a finance company such as Aladdin to see them safely to their new homes (346).

Meanwhile, university students, and some politicians, especially J. M. Kariuki, were protesting against the government and publicly declaiming the corruption in the country. These demonstrations could only be suppressed by the GSU – the General Service Unit, a para-military wing of the police. The writer Ngũgĩ was in exile, and rumours about a basement torture chamber in Freedom House were circulating. In 1975 J. M. Kariuki was murdered mysteriously, beaten and then shot. The bad news quickly travelled round the country and there were riots in the streets and calls for the President to resign. On the other hand, the wealthy and powerful desired no change, and had a dying support for the President.

The novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, tells its story during a time of political strife for Kenya and its people. And Vikram, symbolising Asians in Africa, becomes the ideal go-between for the elite of the new country.

Finally, Bhabha argues:

> There is no simple political or social truth to be learned, for there is no unitary representation of a political agency, no fixed hierarchy of political values and effects.

> My illustration attempts to display the importance of the hybrid moment of political change. Here the transformational value of change lies in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One* (unitary working class) *nor the Other* (the politics of gender) *but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both … We need a little less piestic articulation of political principle (around class and nation); a little more of the principle of political *negotiation*. (41)

M.G. Vassanji in the novel is concerned with the same things Bhabha mentions; by focussing on the in-between spaces inherent in the postcolonial situation and by avoiding the polarities, it may be that the colonised can reach an agreement on his identity, which is hybridity. True, Vikram does not ever attain this happiness, but Vassanji's exploration nevertheless is an important step not only towards awakening greater consciousness about the lasting effects of colonialism, but also towards understanding the complexities and difficulties that stand in the way of the transformations Bhabha suggests are so vital.

CHAPTER III

AMBIVALENCE

"Neti, neti." (Not this, not that.)

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

At the very beginning of the novel, when Vikram Lall describes the world of his childhood, M.G. Vassanji draws the attention of the reader to the ambivalent atmosphere, full of contradictory elements, of the Kenya of the 1950s: "It was a world of innocence and play, under a guileless constant sun; as well, of barbarous cruelty and terror lurking in darkest night; a colonial world of repressive, undignified subjecthood, as also seductive order and security" (7).

3.1. Homi Bhabha on Ambivalence

Ambivalence can be defined as the state of having two opposing feelings at the same time, or being uncertain about how you feel (*"ambivalence"*). The term was first used in the field of psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite (Ashcroft 12). According to Freud ambivalence occurs when "opposing pairs of instincts are developed to an approximately equal extent" (qtd. in Childs and Williams 124). Homi Bhabha, who introduced the term 'ambivalence' to the post-colonial theory, mainly focuses on the ambivalent relation between the coloniser and the colonised and the colonial discourse. For Bhabha, colonial discourse is also ambivalent.

Colonialism brought ‘ambivalence’ to the lands it occupied from the very first day. Sartre, in the preface he wrote for Fanon’s book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, summarising colonialism, mentions the dilemma that the colonised was placed in: “civilians come and settle on their land and force them to work for them under the whip. If they resist, the soldiers fire, and they are dead men; if they give in and degrade themselves, they are no longer men. Shame and fear warp their character and dislocate their personality” (l). That is the simplest level of in-betweenness that the colonised are exposed to. Over time, as the White masters make more concerted efforts to create a perfect ‘other’ for themselves, the colonised begin to lose their identity.

Bhabha, in his article *Interrogating Identity,* reveals the process of identification in order to point out the inevitable ambivalent characteristic of postcolonial identity:

> First: to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus … Second: the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting … Finally, the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy. (63-64)

Childs and Williams summarise Bhabha’s understanding of ambivalence “like the colonial fantasy ‘to be in two places at once’, to be the coloniser and the colonised” (124). Not only to escape from the bruised position but also to feel the satisfaction of a higher social class, the colonised desires to be in the place of the coloniser. Fanon also argues that the colonised wants to usurp the coloniser’s place to look down at them. While carrying a deep hatred of the coloniser, the colonised envies their life: “there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler’s place” (qtd. in Bhabha 63).

This traumatic desire and its consequences can only be explained by Bhabha's theory of ambivalence - "a process of identification and of disavowal" (122). He defines this process as "discursive"; "the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*) does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence. By 'partial' I mean both 'incomplete' and 'virtual'" (123). The colonial discourse and the passion for an identity creates a man of not yet; a 'mimic' who is "*a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (122).

Bhabha explains the reason of this paradox as the colonial world's demand – 'turn white or disappear'. However, it is not only the colonised who is caught in this paranoia, also "the coloniser is himself caught in the ambivalence of paranoiac identification, alternating between fantasies of megalomania and persecution" (88).

Fanon, who aims "at nothing less than to liberate the black man from himself" (xii), in his book *Black Skins White Masks*, draws attention to the in-between situation of the black man; "The educated black man, slave of the myth of the spontaneous and cosmic Negro, feels at some point in time that his race no longer understands him. Or that he no longer understands his race" (xviii). The 'educational hybrid' who is alienated from his/her people suffers another ambivalent situation of the colonial world.

Nevertheless, the end of colonialism did not remedy this situation, the ambivalent atmosphere is still today continuing to work at large in these lands. Stuart Hall claims that the man who was once colonised suffers from "the endless desire to return to "lost origins", to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning

… And yet, this “return to the beginning’ is like the imaginary in Lacan – it can neither be fulfilled nor requited” (245).

3.2. *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and Ambivalence

Ambivalence in a much wider sense is at the heart of M.G. Vassanji’s novel, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. There is not merely an interplay between the coloniser and the colonised. Vassanji highlights the existence of a third side in this bilateral/two-sided/mutual relationship. The novel starts with a quotation from T.S. Eliot which asks “Who is the third who walks always beside you?” Vassanji thus immediately introduces and foregrounds the novel’s central theme to the reader, the tale of this third person who is trapped in the complexities of colonial and postcolonial relations.

In the novel there is a class and power struggle not only between the Blacks and Whites but among the Black (African), White (European) and, Brown (Indian) societies. Vikram Lall, who is a member of the Indian Diaspora in Kenya is in an in-between position; neither the colonised nor strictly a coloniser.

The colonial setting in Kenya was not a simple dichotomy. East Africa – Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania – which had been multicultural inside its black community with different ethnic groups before European-based colonialism ever eventuated, became even more multicultural with its new White settlers and Brown migrant communities. The Indians acted as “imperial auxiliaries” in the colony:

> In the British Empire, the use of “imperial auxiliaries” was widespread. In many cases, this role was fulfilled by Indians who left India to work in other colonies as traders, teachers, petty civil servants, and so on, occupying a buffer zone between the “imperial agents” and the “natives”. Often they would be more distrusted and

> disliked by the local population than the "imperial agents" on whom they modelled themselves. (Atabaki and Mehendale 57)

The situation of the Brown race in the complex mosaic of East Africa was complicated and unstable. They were standing in the middle of polar two groups, the Blacks and the Whites, on the ladder of social hierarchy. They seemed to have a superior position compared to the Africans. The Brown man was the collaborator of the White man in the colony. They also acted as representatives of the British at certain times when White men preferred not to be on the scene. However, this did not help exempt them from still having to hold a position inferior to the Whites in the social structure of the colony. Vassanji makes explicit this scenario for his readers:

> Nonwhites were not permitted in the club, but on special occasions such as this one, an area of the pavilion was set aside for the Asians. The Europeans, dressed smartly in white, the ladies wearing hats, sat in the wide, open, raised veranda of the clubhouse or outside on the grass where tables had been laid out. African waiters moved about wearing long, white kanzus, green sashes across their fronts, and green fezzes. (65)

In colonial East Africa, the British were the most superior citizens; Asians were in somewhere between the British and the Africans, while the Africans were the most inferior ones, serving these two groups.

Vassanji by setting his novel in the political atmosphere of the decolonising East Africa delves deeply into the 'Third Space' which Homi Bhabha defines as, "the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (56). He highlights the productive capacity of this Third Space in his book *The Location of Culture*:

> For a willingness to descend into that alien territory … may open the way to conceptualising an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. (56)

In addition, Ashcroft *et al.* also claim that it is "the 'in-between' space that carries the burden and meaning of culture, and this is what makes the notion of hybridity so important. The term 'hybridity', associated with Bhabha, refers "to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation" (2005: 118).

For Bhabha, this Third Space is a theoretical construct, a notional place of in-betweenness, not an actual partition of the social order as that occupied by the Indian community in the Kenyan social structure. However, by examining a decolonising and post-colonial Kenyan world from point of view of a character existing within such an in-between social milieu, Vassanji allows the reader to experience the mutual and interdependent relation of the colonised and the coloniser in a new way, one that is neither positioned from the White/coloniser perspective not the Black/colonised perspective. In fact, in *The In-between World of Vikram Lall*, the same ambivalent interactions that Bhabha discusses actually occur not only between the White and Black, but also between the White and Brown characters, on the one hand, and the Brown and the Black, on the other. This complex structure of ambivalent interactions and relations between the Blacks, Browns and Whites are a central theme to the novel.

Vassanji, by portraying ambivalent characters and identities from different groups and their mutual effects on each other during the decolonisation period, shows different examples and different perspectives of 'the other', and questions any simplistic understanding of this multifaceted subject. Vassanji foregrounds the nebulosity of identity by choosing to make Vikram Lall the novel's protagonist a

stereotypical villain character. Vikram introduces himself to the reader on the first page:

> My name is Vikram Lall. I have the distinction of having been numbered one of Africa's most corrupt men, a cheat of monstrous and reptilian cunning. To me has been attributed the emptying of a large part of my troubled country's treasury in recent years. I head my country's List of Shame. These and other descriptions actually flatter my intelligence, if not my moral sensibility. (3)

However, this description is belied by the following text in which the crimes Vikram is supposed to have committed are long held back from the reader and instead he is introduced as in a sympathetic manner. This also has the effect of negating or challenging any preconceived notions or prejudices about Asian Africans that the reader may have. Vassanji, once a member of the Asian Diaspora in East Africa, puts forward the in-between situation of his people and the effect of the land on the construction of these diasporic identities. Cohen outlines the situation of Indians in the colonial Africa well:

> Indians in South African were thus thrust unwillingly into a "V", not of their own making. Turn right, towards the white regime, and they were rejecting their fellow victims of apartheid; turn left, in the direction of black solidarity, and they became frightened of losing what status, rights and property they had acquired. Perhaps, not surprisingly, many remained uneasily where they were, like rabbits trapped before the headlights of an oncoming car. (65)

The ambivalences in Vikram's inner world and in his different roles in the society show how unfair and shallow it is to stereotype or judge a person based solely on his or her racial, social or other identity.

This quest for self and the concurrent feeling being trapped in-between the ambivalent cultural, political, ethnic, racial, and national identities of the time, is not only the situation for Vikram Lall, but also applies equally strongly to most of the

other characters in the novel. They all suffer from in-betweenness at some level. The reader follows those characters' various voyages of self-discovery in the multicultural and dynamic structure of decolonising Kenya and witnesses how the political affects the personal. As a result of the political and historical context of Kenya, every man in this land who experienced those times experienced the painful process leading to a sense of homelessness and ambivalence. And while some gained a sense of hybridity and welcomed it as richness, others could not.

Sakina Molabux is one of the minor but prominent figures in the novel whose voice we never hear directly, but only known through the mediation of Vikram's eyes. Vikram depicts a delightful memory for him from 'the year of love and friendship' – his term for the time before the political disturbances of the Mau Mau rebellion took place. Vikram remembers a group of Masai youth performing a traditional war dance outside the Molabux residence. Sakina-dadi, with her Masai husband standing next to her, watched the performance motionless at her doorway. Vikram wondered how she felt as an Asian in appearance and public but a full Masai in secret:

> In what manner would the drumbeat, the dance, have brought back her youth? Did she ever yearn for the simplicity and open life of the grasslands? Or, like what she was expected to be, had she easily given up thinking of that past, relishing her privileged urban status and her wealth? Did she ever stop worshipping the God Ngai of her childhood, did the spirits of the trees and the forests and the grasslands haunt her? The sour note of that moment came when Saeed Molabux angrily stormed to his mother and father and drove off noisily in his car. He obviously didn't think much of his Masai heritage. I would learn that Saeed had an elder brother who had disappeared, had in fact gone to his maternal origins to become a Masai moran, and had that afternoon, following rehearsal at the football ground, brought his friends to perform for his mother. (58)

It was not only Vikram who wondered how Sakina-dadi solved her identity problem. For the Mother Lall it was also a mystery; “What must it be like to be a Masai and also a Muslim Punjabi … Are we really Africans?” (96).

Identity conflict was at the centre of all the characters in the novel. Therefore, the ambivalence of identity during the decolonisation era can be understood by analysing the characters in the novel. Vikram Lall, his uncle Mahesh, and his black friend Njoroge are typical examples of their time and people. These major characters struggle to re/construct their identity in the contradictory and ambivalent space of the postcolonial world.

3.2.1. Portrait of a Minority – Vikram Lall

Vikram Lall’s in-between world is mainly because of his racial and colonial heritage. Throughout the novel Vikram Lall’s quest for ‘self’ and at the same time his struggle with his past that haunts his present and also his future are dealt with. M.G. Vassanji gives Vikram a voice to tell his life story which was especially his childhood full of tragic and traumatic events that opened chronic wounds in his soul. Lall tells his story miles away from Kenya in Canada, where he lives in a kind of exile from his ‘home’. Despite the distance he is surrounded by memories of the past. He states his that reason for this interest in his own past is “to look past and around those glimmer points in our desperate search for nuance and completeness, for coherence and meaning” (56). The feeling of always being incomplete and inadequate chases him even in his adulthood. In other words, since his childhood Vikram Lall has been in a constant search to fulfil the hollow part in his soul.

Firstly, he was born into a polarised world having that offered him no room on either side. Although Vikram Lall claims that he is a Kenyan no less than his black friend – Njoroge, he is well aware of his position in the society.

> I was also aware that he was more from Africa than I was. He was African, I was Asian. His black skin was matte, his wholly hair impossibly alien. I was smaller, with pointed elvish ears, my skin was annoyingly "medium," as I described it then, neither one (white) nor the other (black). (25)

Vikram's sense of ambivalent belonging made it difficult for him to find a satisfactory hero to emulate in the childhood role-play games that he and his sister and their friends played. Bill, their European friend, had many heroes, most of which were familiar to them from school. On the other hand, Vikram could not find a hero that he could associate with himself. His mother tried to persuade him that Shree Rama, ten-headed Ravana, and Bhim of the Pandavas were worthy Indian heroes. But Vikram complained, "Not *those* kinds of heroes, Ma! Not gods!" (46). Vikram was not satisfied with this mythological heroes as he was looking for a real human from flesh and blood like the ones he read of at school. Even his black friend, Njoroge had a hero – Moses, whose story had been passed from generation to generation, "Moses send plague on the pharaoh and destroyed his crop and animals, he sent the angel of death in the dark of the night to kill the Egyptians' eldest sons, until finally the pharaoh gave up and Moses took his people to freedom" (47). Jomo Kenyatta was Njoroge's real-life 'Moses', his real-life hero. As Njoroge proudly explained to Vikram in secret:

> He was the one who was in jail in Kapenguria; when he came out he would take his people to freedom; all the lands of the Kikuyu – he made a sweeping gesture – would be returned to them, all the cattle and sheep would come to graze. All the white people would go home to England. (47)

Njoroge's explanations did not go any further than perplexing Vikram's mind. What Vikram could not understand was if Jomo's coming would also mean displacement of his friends Bill and Annie from the land, and even his own.

Vassanji's Vikram, even as a child, seems beset by in-betweenness. At one point he bewails why he knows so little of the world in comparison to his friend Bill, "there was a mystery and depth to Bill and his Englishness" (48). This self-perceived lack was a self-degrading and humiliating experience for Vikram. He confesses this as an adult, "In that year of our friendship, when we played together I couldn't help feeling that both Bill and Njoroge were genuine, in their very different ways; only I, who stood in the middle, Vikram Lall, cherished son of an Indian grocer, sounded false to myself, rang hollow like a bad penny" (48).

The two children's talk and the stream of consciousness from Vikram is one of the climaxes of the novel wherein Vikram's in-betweenness, fatality, and strong allegiance to the land he was born and grew up in are witnessed.

> And would the Asians go home to India? I didn't want to go to India, to the tumult and the dust and where you stepped into shit even in a posh taxi, as Papa described it. Not even to the enchanted forests of Rama and Sita, as Mother would have it. I knew of no world outside my Nakuru, this home, this backyard, the shopping centre, the school; this town[.] (47)

Despite all the ambivalences, Vikram feels a strong belonging to the land he was born in: "This was my country – how could it not be? Yes, there was that yearning for England, the land of Annie and Bill and the Queen, and for all the exciting, wonderful possibilities of the larger world out there. But this, all around me, was mine, where I belonged with my heart and soul" (105).

As the novel progresses there are a number of changes of place for the protagonist. First to Nairobi, then Dar es Salaam where Vikram goes to university. Vassanji portrays these cities as having characters just as people do. Vikram's choice to do university in Dar es Salaam was a type of escape from Nairobi – "its constant striving and ambition" (181). In contrast, Vikram felt relief in Dar es Salaam, "a place very different and organic in nature" (181) and his dormitory room at the university was a "calm haven" (181).

The character of Dar es Salaam and of Vikram are similar in many ways: "Dar es Salaam was African and Asian, disordered and chaotic, hot and dusty, yet in its essence wonderfully relaxed and self-assured" (181). The ambivalent characteristics of the city reflect Vikram's own in-betweenness. The duality in Vikram's character can also be seen here. While Nairobi represented Vikram's persona, Dar es Salaam represented his inner world. "Nairobi has been always an alien city, uneasy home to its inhabitants. It was founded as a way station, after all, a place of convenience, for commerce, and it has retained much of that heartless character" (181). Vikram calls Nairobi a "city I love and yet sometimes feel sorry for" (181).

The friends Vikram, Njoroge, and Deepa meet years later in a newly independent country, Kenya. And still Vikram feels as again the 'third one, the odd one out, the chaperone' (162) among the three friends. Vikram was impressed by the change his friend 'Njo' had gone through. The light in his friend's eyes was promising happy new days for him and also for his people. In contrast, the Lalls were the same according to Vikram. Their concerns were still "mundane and ordinary" (149), they remained "that enigma, the Asians of Africa" (149).

The portray of the disjunction between Njoroge and Vikram is replete with examples of the contradictory elements that appertain to the social world the characters inhabit. When, after the rebellion is successful, Njoroge takes Vikram to Uhuru Park to witness a parade of the former freedom fighters – Mau Mau – the experience is quite different for both men. For Njoroge it is a chance to shake hands with the people who fought for their independence, yet that 'golden opportunity' did not mean much to Vikram. This comes to a head when Vikram observes Khika, the Bruces' former servant, and realises the possibility of Khika being involved in the awful murders of his childhood friends and their parents. A heated discussion arises between Vikram and Njoroge. Vikram cannot countenance murder: "They are evil, those who kill children! Your grandfather Mwangi said that, … *They are evil, those who kill children"* (158). This reaction beautifully links language and imagery, where the image of Khika clutching a large black Bible to his chest is paralleled by the use of the Biblically-loaded term "evil". However, Njoroge's reply was quick and sharp: "And those who go about killing grandfathers?" (158). According to Njoroge, it was a war and innocent people die in war, there was no way to avoid this. It was a serious and complex rift between the friends. The way they perceived the past places the two on opposing sides. For Njoroge, in spite of the fact that "Mau Mau murders were reprehensible, they were for a cause and necessary" (159) and the fact that Africans suffered more should be borne in mind forever (157-9).

Another relationship of Vikram's that is affected by ambivalence is his romantic connection with Yasmin, an Asian university student in Dar as Salaam. Here, despite both being Asian Africans, her involvement with Vikram was not approved by her society as she was a Shamsi while Vikram was a Punjabi Hindu: "I

knew that her parents, although courteous and hospitable on the surface, were intensely against their daughter hitching up with me, a Hindu Punjabi; her two brothers were brief to the point of rudeness – because I was “par-comm,” an outsider, and apparently exploiting their sister’s naïveté” (183). Even among Indians there was no unified culture with various groups having different religions, languages and cultures. Despite all, the two went on their relationship; they took delight in exploring the other. However, Vikram could not feel ready to open his whole heart to her and they separated.

Lall writes about his fear of commitment to a woman that he could not share with his sister:

> The truth, which I did not tell her then, was simply my failure of heart. I could not find that passion within me, even a small reasonable portion of the tempestuous, uncontrollable, unbearable spring of love such as she found in herself, to take me over my hill with Yasmin. There was a frozen core buried deep inside me that I could not dislodge or melt, that held me back. Thus even the question of what Mother would think of my relationship seemed somewhat beside the point. (202-203)

In fact it was true, even if Vikram was sure about what he wanted, nobody would approve of their marriage. The Asian Diaspora was also divided in itself; they could not unite because of many social dimensions, such as “religion (Hindu, Sikh, and Parsi), language (Punjabi, Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu), region of origin (Punjab, Andhra, and Gujarat), and caste” (Dufoix 44-45). The discrimination in the society was wider than they could imagine: “Nobody in Dar likes to see me walking with a Shamsi girl … it’s not just our mother and father, it’s what we Asians are, even with each other. And if you think about it, others in this whole wide world are not much better … even in America” (Vassanji 203).

Vikram claims his Asian identity as the reason behind his corruption although at the same time admitting that there would be people to argue that he would no doubt reached the same degenerate end through some other means if he had not been an Asian. Although the character states that he does not intend to defend himself or even seek redemption (3), he nevertheless asks the reader to make a judgment in the following pages. Vikram might not have the expectation of being absolved of guilt for the things he has done, yet he still seeks understanding by telling the story of Kenya and himself.

> You will judge yourself. Here I was, a young Asian graduate in an African country, with neither the prestige of whiteness or Europeanness behind me, nor the influence and numbers of a local tribe to back me, but carrying instead the stigma from a generalised recent memory of an exclusive race of brown "Shylocks" who had collaborated with the colonisers. What could I hope to achieve in public service? Black chauvinism and reverse racism were the order of the day against Asians. (238-239)

Vassanji highlights the complex nature of the post-colonial situation by giving his protagonist yet another level of in-betweenness, via Vikram's job at the Ministry of Transport. This job nurses Vikram's in-between identity: "I was leading a carefully orchestrated double life, only for the good of the nation, I had been assured" (259). Moreover, the job required secrecy and discretion, for he was dealing with money and the less he knew, the better it was. Hence, Vikram never questioned who the recipients of the foreign grants were. From his point of view, "I was simply an intermediary between the donors and the beneficiaries" (270).

Vikram's experiences, dominated, as they were at every turn, by inescapable in-betweenness of one type or another, lead him towards a worldview which has an overriding sense of personal powerlessness:

> To me the world was what it was, a far from perfect and a tangled manifold. It was not for me to change this world. Moral judgements, therefore, I shied away from, and this became the secret of my success. As an eight-year-old I had seen my beloved Mahesh Uncle take up a moral cause. He desired a different world and ended up abetting the slaughter of my friend Annie and her family and being responsible for much more. I never recovered from the shock of those events ... I therefore prefer my place in the middle, watch events run their course. This is easy, being an Asian, it is my natural place. (285)

As a consequence, witnessing the coming into being of the new country no longer excited Vikram as the prospect of this had in the past. It was becoming a country for only Blacks and he was not one of them. His dream of becoming a Kenya citizen, the dream of a union – Black, Brown, and White together changing their world – began to fade away.

Even in his marriage and in his own home Vikram was in-between. After his failed relationship with Sophie, Vikram opts for a traditional Indian arranged marriage to Shobha which he summarises in two sentences: “So this is it, my friend, marriage to a virgin Indian girl, a pack of children and the straight family life. Rice and daal and chappati forever” (267). Shobha was a very traditional woman; Vikram’s and her expectations from marriage never met. Theirs was a dull relationship with no passion. Vikram notes that his wife looked down on him with “an element of condescension perhaps for the fact that I was a mere middleman, a dalal as she called it, an agent of others” (290). In addition, Vikram did not gain much pleasure from being a father, as Shobha was the perfect Indian mother who raised her children according to the traditions and necessities of the modern world as well.

Vikram’s misery carried him back to Sophia and a forbidden relation started between the two. Sophia symbolises the West; she conquers, exploits, and abandons

Vikram in a way which he can never forget. Vikram was powerless to resist her even though this time he knew the reality that Sophia no doubt "was a hooker, though of an expensive and exclusive (I flatter myself) variety" (289). Vikram describes that relationship: "More than sex – which came near the end of our meetings, and was brief but satisfying – there was our friendship" (290). Sophia was Vikram's "private spark of life and joy in an otherwise apathetic existence" (308) but only, of course, until she found a rich businessman from South West Africa and married him. Vassanji's metaphorical message here is that when the mercenary West has no need for the East, it is discarded.

Other relationships for Vikram dissolve. When he is publicly fingered for the Gemstone Scandal, his wife Shobha leaves, taking their children with her. At first, Vikram refuses to leave the country because he believes he was not "any more guilty than a hundred others" and was instead "certainly less guilty than many [he] could name" (348). He was looking forward to the general amnesty which was said to come soon and would be another opportunity to start afresh for the businessmen and politicians of Kenya. However, in the end, Vikram has to leave his home country. Although in grave danger, Vikram's ability to incriminate other high-level government officials involved in corruption had provided him with some safety, but this safety, like so many others, it eventually dried up:

> Representatives of the donor countries, who underwrite social programs in our part of Africa, and of the World Bank, came to Nairobi, having frozen all aid and loan instalments, and demanded an immediate account of the hundreds of millions of dollars that had disappeared from the national kitty. The government set up the independent Anti-Corruption Commission to satisfy the Donors of the Bank, and the commission published its List of Shame; Vikram Lall's name was first. I was invited to testify about my questionable business dealings, in particular the Gemstone Scandal. But if Vikram Lall

> spoke, as everybody knew, a lot of prominent people would get skewered. I possessed information that I could help indict a platoon of politicians and a hive of senior bureaucrats. The country, goaded on by the newspapers and the government's opponents, held its breath: would I come forward? Meanwhile hitmen, I was warned, had been paid for my blood. And so Vikram Lall absconded for this town on Lake Ontario where he had earlier invested in a property. (349)

Although Vikram might be safe in Canada he is an alien to the land and longs to be back in his country, Kenya.

> I feel strongly the stir of the forest inside me; I hear the call of the red earth' and the silent plains of the Rift Valley through which runs the railway that my people built, and the bustle of River Road; I long the harsh, familiar caress of the hot sun (344).

Here Vassanji's message is that while an ambivalent identity may on one level seem to offer only a contradictory viewpoint for life, although it can instil a sense of homelessness, this does not necessarily obviate a sense of belonging. Vikram still has strong a connection to his Kenya. Hybridity, ambivalence and the post-colonial condition are not, as Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism*, impossible to overcome. Vikram begins writing his memoirs and the process of writing forces him to face the realities of his life and his self, and from there he undergoes under a dramatic transformation: "I long believed that mine were crimes of circumstance, of finding oneself in a situation and simply going along with way of the world. I've convinced myself now that this excuse is not good enough" (344). He decides that it is time to meet his destiny, return to Kenya and clear his name from the List of Shame.

When he returns to Kenya, although he knows that this land is no longer safe for him, he feels that for better or worse this is where he belongs. "There is something immeasurably familiar in the feel of the cool Nairobi night that tells you

you are home, that for better or worse, this where you belong" (353). Interestingly, Vikram can only enter his country under a different identity, with a new name and a new passport. His identity has to undergo yet another level of diffusion, of disjunction, of subterfuge. He is hopeful; he plans to talk to the Anti-Corruption Commission and make peace with them. He wants to come clean, at least on the Gemstone Scandal, and will not hesitate to give most of his wealth to the Commission and to a foundation. He believes that this will satisfy them, and the Donors, and the World Bank, and let him start a new life in Kenya. He is aware of the people who will be willing to silence him first when they learn that he is back but he believes he will convince them that he is not a threat to them. After all, they were once his friends.

However, Father Lall is worried as he knows things will not be so easy. Vikram Lall has in the past been the perfect scapegoat for the blacks, "an Indian without constituency, whom they could hold up and display to the World Bank and the Donors as the crafty alien corruptor of their new country" (365). The action that he is planning to take is out of expectations. Everybody knows that it is impossible to charge Vikram without also charging a veritable army of public servants and friends of government, the "corruption in the country goes back thirty years, reaches the very top, and even into the ranks of the opposition" (365).

Vassanji again invokes utopian ideals by making Vikram first head to Jamieson station, before assailing the harsher realities of the political and social world he had escaped, symbolically an oasis of peace and tranquillity, an oasis in a desert, a calm before the storm. And, plot-wise, it should not be forgotten, also to reclaim the case of belongings he left before his flight to Canada. "It is not simply to

hide for a few days that I have come but also to collect the little trunk I left here a long time ago when the Old Man died and the New Man took over and feared for my safety" (359). For a time Vikram finds peace in their company; with them he becomes a part of a 'desperate' dream come true – a black, a white, and a brown sharing the same sphere tranquilly. Vikram portrays the equilibrium that prevails amongst them: "there are no complicated questions between us. It is the forest, in whose shadow we are, that owns us" (360).

However, when returns to Nairobi he is confronted with great change. He stays in Somali Town – the only safe haven for such a renegade – which just happens to be the former main Indian quarter of the city. Vikram is forced to compare this to his former days in Nairobi: "This is a different country now, an alien planet, and the first language is not Punjabi but Somali" (362). Instead of staying with a Hindu family, or at least even a Punjabi family, Vikram is given sanctuary by Muslim Mombasa Arabs. The negative effects of the post-colonial condition are rife, unavoidable, everywhere to be seen. It is impossible not to witness the misery and poverty in this separated part of the city. Vikram feels lonely in this unfamiliar place his inner conflicts are again aroused:

> I wonder, not for the first time, if I made the right decision, returning. By all the measures of practical common sense that I can summon, it was a foolish decision. But I could not have lived out the rest of my days an escape from my world. I had come back and face it – though I still await to emerge safely from this weird underground. (366).

Nonetheless, Vikram is undaunted: "Ultimately I will have my say; and I will make peace with my world" (366).

Vassanji has again brought the wheel of Vikram's fate to the zenith of the circle before plunging it down to its nadir. This continuing oscillation of Vikram's

fortune is a novelistic device that through its inevitability insists upon the inevitable outcomes of ambivalence, of the desire to be and to not be, to simultaneously love and despise. The love for his country and homeland informs some of Vikram's actions, loathing and self-loath result in other actions.

The playing-out of these contradictory actions has unavoidable consequences for Vikram Lall's future. At first things go Vikram's way: Joseph's release from prison, in which he was tortured by "the water hose … and starvation" (360), turns out to be as easy as planned, albeit the price of freedom requires a lot of 'green' cash from Vikram. And, although the two men could not build a close relationship due to Vikram's publicly known corruptness and Joseph's racism, there is a sense that Vikram is striving for atonement as he prefers to remain an anonymous benefactor.

Indeed, it has been a long time since hope got touched Vikram Lall so closely. He is as happy as a child and makes plans with Deepa on the phone for future. He adapts himself to the new environment of Somali Town where he is known with a different name. This is significant, as a new name means a new identity and Vikram Lall uses the benefits of this freedom. He wears a kanzu and kofia like a devout Muslim in his new neighbourhood. Vikram is in a different mood even he fails to understand himself. It seems like he is really close to the end of his inner journey to his self. Vassanji then builds on this construction of joy and hope with Vikram's lawyer's news adding new joy to his peace:

> What you are offering is enough for them. The Donors and the World Bank will be pleased, all they want is some admission, after all some accountability. You come clean on the Gemstone Scandal, you need not name names, you hand over the money; and you get clean bill of health – you start anew. This is the first real break they've had since their mandate, Vic. The commission is excited. Now they can hope

> other individuals will be persuaded to follow your example – and this could be the beginning of truth and reconciliation. (367)

However, his joy only lasts until the next call of his lawyer. The Anti-Corruption Commission has been declared illegal and disbanded, which means that there is now no-one Vikram can explain anything to. Corruption in the new government, a condition inherited from the colonial era, means that Vikram is once again caught in the middle:

> I have been left dangling. I have been outsmarted. It's clear that powerful people close to the government prefer me to keep my mouth shut. I have no friends and my former partners – rightfully – don't trust me. I came ready to shed a large load off my shoulders; I was naïve in my expectations, which were inspired perhaps by an alien environment, but I also know that I had no choice. Now there is nowhere to put that load. It only makes me a target. (369)

For Vikram, history is recurring; he used to believe that good things might happen in life but gradually he has lost his hope and this has carried him into the centre of the corrupted life of Africa.

One of the consequences of diaspora can be a sense of homelessness, which is connected to ambivalence. Vikram Lall is now suffering from this feeling of homeless; there is no place or group he can claim an allegiance to. He visits a Hindu temple to make peace with his mother's gods, he visits a church; in fact, the desire of belonging becomes so unbearable that he also starts practising some Muslim rituals in his new neighbourhood although he cannot understand them nor follow them properly: "I don't know what is happening to me, perhaps I simply long to belong somewhere" (369). Finally, the suspicious fire in the building he lives in puts an end to his search for peace, home, and identity. The in-between world of Vikram Lall ends with the fire.

Here Vassanji invokes the ancient religious symbolism of purifying fire. Symbolically, fire cleanses all his sins; Vikram is thus purified of his past that haunts him and is hence ready for a newborn identity. From the point of view of Indian traditional religious belief his soul is ready to migrate to a new body or an identity as Vikram Lall has come cleansed of his past. However, it was not only the fire that has helped him reach the calmness he has adopted during the last days of his life. There has been a catharsis, a huge surge of relief, brought about by finally finishing the telling his story. Here the reader can recall Vikram's statement in his preface that "if more of us told our stories to each other, where I come from, we would be a far happier and less nervous people" (3). That is to say, Vikram's writing his biography achieves its purpose; throughout the novel he has been in search of his self, to come to terms with his own identity: "I have no explanations for myself either. My life simply happened, without deep designs on my part. Perhaps this narration of my life will explain me to myself" (271).

M. G. Vassanji writes the story of an in-between man who witnesses the freedom struggle in Kenya from up close because he believes that the postcolonial writer "gives himself a history; he recreates the past, which exists only in memory and is otherwise obliterated, so fast has his world transformed" (1985: 63). By doing so he believes that he might help his people come to terms with their history. The building a solid, healthy, stable future for the citizens of the new country could only be possible with sharing the memories. It is time to turn back and face the ghosts of the past; only by doing so one can free oneself from the invisible chains of colonialism. Vassanji does not ask his readers to forget or erase the things happened in the past but to forgive and understand. As a result the curtain of mist might be

opened to clear our vision of not only of the past, the present and, significantly, the future.

3.2.1.1. Ambivalent Power Relations inVikram Lall's World

So far we have seen that in his novel Vassanji paints a number of relationships for his protagonist that seem in the beginning to offer potential success within the complex hybrid situation of decolonising Kenya, but end in failure. Vikram's relationship with Bill and Annie, Njoroge, Sophie, his wife Shobha, his relationship with Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, with his white employers, with the Mau Mau: all failures, failures brought about by an inescapable ambivalence that runs as undercurrent throughout the novel, throughout the characters, Black, White and Brown, throughout their identities and the relationships between them. The excessively unbalanced power structures of colonialism have significant and lasting outfall for the future political and social lives of countries that go through the painful process of decolonisation.

When reading Vassanji's *Vikram Lall*, it is essential to not forget that the Indian Diaspora in East Africa came to their new home from British India, the jewel in the crown of Queen Victoria's mighty empire upon which the sun never set. Here Bhabha's insistence on the colonised's desire to mimic and to be in the shoes of the colonisers is graphically illustrated in the novel, especially in the episode when Vikram takes his father on a business trip to London, a trip that brought joy and comfort to both men. Vikram knew that Father Lall actually adored the Empire, "it was his dearest wish to visit the centre of the universe once in his lifetime" (104). For Vikram's father, London was "his Mecca, his Varanasi, his Jerusalem. A visit there

conferred status, moreover: you became one of the select group, the London-returned" (104). This notion of a 'select group' is from the point of view of the Indian Diaspora. Despite his old age, Vikram's father "was excited as a schoolboy" (295). The father and son walked the streets of London, visiting places which had carried powerful meaning in their lives. Vikram thought;

> He had arrived on the scene a decade and a half too late; everything we saw seemed almost immaterial now, devoid of the charge it had once carried in a British colony far away and long ago. I felt that if she had known about him, the Queen would surely have granted this man, this admirer for so long, an audience, to discuss with him the passage of time and the end of empire, and how they both had aged. (297)

During this London trip the father and son found the intimacy that they could not find for years in the rush of the life. Vikram finally confessed to his father about the night he saw Mahesh Uncle with the missing gun. Mr. Lall was deeply shocked; "His mouth fell open" and he said "You must have suffered, keeping that secret, Vic, all bottled up" (298) and he hold his son's hand tightly as if to retrieve the past.

Vikram's revealing the past to his friend Njoroge and then again to his father were signs of a recovery process. Although it may seem superficially as a process of reopening old wounds, to the contrary, it was the start of a healing process for his chronic wounds. However, the recovery process was cut by another betrayal. Once again, Vassanji entices with hope only to return to the theme of hopelessness and helplessness that is he is suggesting is a consequence of the machinations of colonialism. Vikram lost his chance for a recovery from his sorrow. The irony of life re-takes centre stage when Vikram is betrayed by his 'father', Mzee Jomo Kenyatta; he was sacked from his job for following orders. His place was not anymore in government. In other words they got rid of Vikram when they are done with him: "I

had been, simply put, dropped – because I was the convenient scapegoat the disposable outsider, and my usefulness had run out" (301). The power play of colonialism continues.

After this next step in the series of setbacks, Vikram headed to Jamieson station to seek peace in the company of a black and white couple living there. He had discovered this couple during the years he travelled along the railway as a part of his job. The station had been renamed after the murder of its white station master, Jamieson, and his two children, and closed a few years later when the white settlers left the area. Janice, the wife of the station master, did not want to go back home to Britain and leave the graves of her children and husband where she too desired to be buried. She was now living with a black man, a lonely former clerk at the station who had kindly helped her cope with the daily routines. Vikram found the 'equilibrium', the rhythm, of their relationship glamorous and peaceful. To him that was the 'utopia' of an Indian child in Africa – social equilibrium, a balance between forces supposedly or normally in competition with each other. A European, an African, and an Indian in this mysteriously affecting place of Kenya, the atmosphere was magical for Vikram. He enjoyed observing the couple, "he sitting on the ground like me, she on a three-legged low stool. There was a quiet, gentle intimacy between them, and also a deep difference they did not pretend to bridge" (305).

Vassanji deliberately writes this section as a utopia. It is indeed a type of 'no place' – a railway station no longer in use – and, at the same time, a 'eutopia', a hypothetical good place – where Black, Brown and White live in harmony, where hybridity reigns supreme and the destructive forces of colonialism seem magically held at bay.

From here Vikram is able to move forward, repair his home relationship, and once again, set out with a fresh start. However, at the very moment when things seemed to be going his way, hard fate was awaiting him. His is a life punctuated by tragedies. This time, the tragedy that occurs is the fatal shooting of his friend Njoroge in Deepa's pharmacy. Njoroge's murder affects Vikram deeply as Njoroge is embedded deep in Vikram's life and experiences: "I had always realised that Njoroge and I were essentially different; yet we belonged to each other, we had been nurtured in the same soil" (328). By juxtaposing the terms "essentially different" and "belong to each other" Vassanji highlights the coexistence of contradictory feelings that are part and parcel of the overarching ambivalence.

Soon after Njoroge dies, Jomo Kenyatta too dies. Vikram was powerfully impacted by the loss of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, not only emotionally but also materially. His not being invited to the funeral ceremonies was "a blow to his prestige" and "a sign of uncertain times" (332). He had a nervous night thinking of his "almighty protector" and in whose absence he would be "naked and easy-picking".

> Goodbye my father; kwa hei Mzee. You depart like a comet, leave us fumbling mortals to manage as best as we can in the darkness. Those who follow you can never bear your glory and so its brilliance lies shattered in a thousand pieces. But me – you gave me the privilege to share your presence, to call you my father, my father, to experience your enigma and wonder at it. What exactly did you think of me? Once you said to me reproachfully, when I the outsider presumed to offer an opinion on local politics, You think we are simple, but we are as deep and varied as the forest. I often wondered what you meant by "you" and "we." I never saw you angry, yet there were those who said your wrath was profound. You terrified us, but why? You toyed with me, you knew this Muhindi would never belong to your games; yet I know you liked me too, you would never have hurt me. And my friend Njoroge who is dead? – who first taught me to utter your name like a prayer, to sing in your praise, you the Moses of Kenya who would

> bring home the honey, lead you people to freedom? What secrets did you hide in that forest behind that wistful smile, those deep eyes? Did you know he would die, my father, this worshipper who turned bitter apostate; or did you delegate measures that sealed his fate; or did they simply take matters into their own hands, Karimi and the others, and you looked away? I did not know you as a man, but as a father, a god. And as such I take leave of you. (331)

Ambivalence underlies, often in a concealed manner, almost all of Vikram's relationships. He could go on admiring a man who had left him in the lurch. This is a reflection of the powerlessness of the actors in the tragedy of decolonisation. According to Vikram, they had to play the roles given to them, even if this led them to a deep conflict inside their world. Vikram knew that the Old Man's favour to him that was a disfavour to another: in other words, "any of these could turn up to exact a price" (332). It was again time to find his way to survive another turbulence.

But regime change seemed to bring little in terms of real change. Vikram states, "we have a hungry, impatient lot in the new government who've waited long for their turn at the honey pot to come. The hegemony of the Kikuyu is gone, but business is business is still paramount" (333). The new President was called the New Man and was from a different tribe. Most importantly, he had the support of the army. Thus, although it might not be correct to say nothing had changed, the things that changed did were not necessarily to the good of the country. As Vikram reminisces in the 1980s:

> There are those who say if the Old Man showed greed, then those who followed under Patrick Iba Madola took that attribute to its zenith, squeezed the country dry to its rind and core. I rarely met the New Man, which was just as well, for I was too much identified with the old regime. But I came to know well those under his patronage, the perpetually upwardly mobile businessmen and politicians. I was their banker of choice, the alchemist who would transmute currencies, the genie who could make monies vanish and produce gold out of thin air. (335)

The Gemstone Scandal was what put Vikram on the top of List of Shame. Again it was another business which was not Vikram's idea, but like the others it suddenly appeared in front of him: "All we had to do, my partners and I, was to pick up the cards and play" (345). Vikram too takes advantage of the power on offer. Besides, he had many other financial involvements which made him a 'legend' outside the country and provided him comfort prestige, and the friendship of the powerful. They were all easy for Vikram to arrange.

Using the memoir format, Vassanji is able to portray Vikram's crimes through the medium of confession, and thus allow the reader to gain a sense of personal revelation of Vikram's corrupt life and the deep dilemmas of his inner and outer world. Vikram was seeking redemption because he had not grown up as a disloyal citizen but the man he had turned into was far away from what he could have dreamt of himself. He had a dual life. In the novel, Vassanji shows the ambivalence of Vikram by depicting all different sides of his character, neither glorifying his good sides nor criticising his bad sides. He leaves his readers to make up their own minds about Vikram, to listen his story full of self-conflict. Despite his corruption, Vikram was a charitable man. But there are grave reasons behind his outward generosity, as we find out when he admits to his generosity with regard to a young girl named Happy living in Kampala

> Her village had been raided by rebels in northern Uganda, her entire family had been killed except herself and her little brother; she was raped and abducted by the rebels; she was taught to fight her own people and became mistress of a commander. She was now in Kampala and needed money to pay her fees at a convent school. There was a letter from a principal and a transcript showing very good grades. I sent money, of course, I have always given to charity. I would like to say this was my way of transformation, my redemption,

> this terrible knowledge that I had been party to supplying guns to that area where Happy's village was attacked. (348-349)

However, with the end of Cold War in East Africa and under the threat of international communism, the West, which had "supplied aid and loans aplenty… now demanded accountability from the government" (346). The atmosphere in Kenya was slippery. Thanks to the press, the Gemstone Scandal became a public symbol of corruption. As a result, Vikram was again the made scapegoat: "my life seemed, at least in the initial months, cheap to all those I had offended or in whose way I stood" (346).

3.2.2. The Dislocation of Mamaji Mahesh

In the novel, Vassanji uses the story of Mahesh Uncle to highlight the effects of displacement and the political and social turbulence that results from the decolonisation process.

Mahesh Uncle was a different man to the other Indians in his community. He was well-educated with a degree in English. His migration to Kenya was another story of forced displacement. He followed his sister to Kenya due to a number of reasons. The 1940s were hard times for India, "Gandhi was in jail, there were sporadic riots between Hindus and Muslims" (22). There was growing political dissent and dispute in his country. His father, who was a loyal inspector of the British Empire, did not hesitate to arrest his own son who was agitating for the independence of India. After the partition of India, in which his hometown Peshawar became part of Pakistan, Mahesh became one among the millions of refugees. His homeland had become an alien, hostile place. So, he clung to his sister who was the only familiar

thing he had from his past. The brother and sister were very close; they had lost their mother and to survived together in a harsh world. Vikram describes his uncle:

> My father and his brothers called him “communist”, because of his radical ideas, the term having a special ring to it in those days, meaning worthless intellectual ranter. … And just to irk the settlers and the colonial Indians, on occasional days, such as India’s national day, he paraded Nakuru’s main streets in khadi, the pyjama and long shirt combination of homespun cotton that had been the symbol of Indian protest, the uniform of those who had fought for India’s independence. It had desired effect in this British colony, in the heart of white settlerdom, where they still believed in the fifties that the sun would never set on their empire. (22)

Mahesh never hesitates to irritate the white settlers, at least with his presence; he was greatly pleased to remind the coloniser that times were changing and sooner or later the colonial days would end. He preferred to shop from the white shop owners even though they refuse to serve him: “Undaunted by the insult, Mahesh Uncle would return on another day, always ostensibly intending to buy a tube of Colgate, which he could have bought for the half price from an Indian merchant, and which he didn’t use any way, patriot as he was, preferring the traditional charcoal concoction that went by the name of Monkey Brand” (23).

Sunday family lunches in which the whole family came together always involved some level of quarrelling over politics when Mahesh Uncle was present. He was far more educated than the rest and supported African rule in Kenya, “an idea extreme and idiotic to my father and his brothers” (30). One day the quarrel ended up with Vikram’s uncles leaving the house with their families. The reason of this fierce reaction was not because of the things Mahesh said but because the Vikram’s mother interfered in the argument actually to stop it: “Stop it, I tell you! … Why do you have to get into arguments with ignorant folk who know nothing?” (31).

According to Mahesh Uncle, the settlers saw Kenya as another South Africa, except it would be better, more like Devonshire or Surrey, with the Africans their happy servants or junior partners, with Indians playing a similar low-status role. He was honestly concerned for the Africans as he believed that it was the duty of everyone to speak out when they saw a wrong being done. However when it comes to the matter of the Indians of Africa, he was harsh in his criticism:

> Indians were exclusive – almost as racist as the whites – and lazy … their pride going hand in hand with their stupidity. They are naïve and not educated – except in the art of business. They have no idea how the world has changed. They get flattered when a District Commissioner visits their mosque or temple to pray for our Beautiful Queen and the Empire! In this atomic age! After India's independence, after its partition! (118-119)

Ironically, even though he is, to his own mind, criticising his people for their subservience, in doing so Mahesh himself adopts the colonial prejudices and stereotyping towards the Indians. Here, once again, we see the workings out of Bhabha's conceptualisation of hybridity and ambivalence.

Despite his abrasive personality, Vikram was extremely fond of his Mamaji. It was only from Mamaji Mahesh that Vikram could often get realistic and satisfying answers to the questions he had about the world around him. In addition, Mahesh showed approval of Vikram's interest about these issues. He preferred to call Mau Mau rebellion the 'Kenyan freedom struggle' and supported it vocally in the family gatherings which made everybody very nervous. He compared it to the independence struggle of India. The only difference was "Gandhiji's way was nonviolence and negotiation" which was even debatable according to Mahesh Uncle (49). He believed that the British were exaggerating only to gather world support for their oppression. Fighting for freedom was a reasonable cause to justify the means.

Whenever Vikram became worried about the future of Asians in Africa, Mamaji Mahesh was his security in Kenya. From a child's perspective, "This Jomo, I figured, would very well have to leave Mahesh Uncle alone; and if so, my family and I were safe" (49). To the Africans, Mahesh Uncle was also an exception; he was "transparent"; this was how Njoroge described him (87). Vikram knew that his uncle was special; "There was never any doubt what he felt about anything or anybody. *But* he also had his private moments … he had his dark secrets" (88).

And when one of these dark secrets was unexpectedly revealed to Vikram one night, Mahesh Uncle became buried in the dusty memories of Vikram to be remembered regularly with longing and a nagging pain. That night Deepa and Vikram were staying with their uncle in his bungalow near the jungle where he worked. Vikram saw his uncle getting ready to go outdoors.

> I could see what he was up to – intently occupied with an old Indian jute bag he sometimes had on him. On the table were bottles of medicine, packets of Epsom salts – which I knew to be highly recommended by my father as purgative- tins of various foods … a few newspapers ... and something brown and bulky that seemed to be shatteringly familiar. He carefully placed the medicines and tins inside the bag, then folded up the papers and shoved them in, and finally picked up the last object … a gun in a deep-tan holster, simply too much like the one my father had lost! (122)

Vikram's child mind was occupied with questions that were impossible to answer. He decided to follow him. He wanted to believe that Mahesh Uncle was up to something worthwhile, something secret and dangerous but it needed to be something utterly brave that no other adult in his family would understand. On the other hand, Vikram was old enough to know what the jungle portended. Mahesh Uncle met with three men who all carried pangas; "they were Mau Mau". The following morning Vikram could not ask his uncle about the things he had seen,

because he knew, even though a child, that Mau Mau was something taboo and dangerous. He was worried, but nonetheless sure that Mahesh Uncle had reasons to help them. On the other hand, he could not understand his silence when the poor house servant was accused of stealing Father's gun. This partially distanced him from his uncle, but when it was found out that the gun used at the Bruces' violent murder was the one which had been stolen from Father, Vikram refused any kind of closeness with his uncle.

Father Lall's prediction was remarkably ironic; "It will come eventually either to a hangman's noose or a garland for your Mahesh" (185). He was in the suspect list before the independence but later his luck seemed to change. With the independence, Okello Okello, a Marxist politician and Mahesh's friend, became Minister for Home Affairs and Mahesh Uncle his advisor. He was faithfully working for his new country but these happy days did not last long. The current political climate was not safe for them as with Zanzibar's revolution the only leftist sympathisers in Kenya seemed to be "Okello and his entourage" (186). Although they were not wanted in the country, they did not hesitate to speak loudly against the government:

> Don't you see who's got the prime property now, the lion's share of the Kenya Highlands previously owned by the whites? Why, it's the Old Man and his cronies, some of whom even collaborated with the British! Who's getting fat on the land? Mau Mau are now languishing in prison – because they dare to ask, Where is the land we fought for? (187)

In place of what he had dreamt of, the country was being stolen by a new elite class.

After an official visit to the Soviet Union with Okello, Mahesh was unable return to Kenya. On the way back Mahesh stopped at Delhi to go to the funeral of his

grandfather, and afterwards was refused an entry permit by the Kenyan Embassy. In spite of every effort, he had to stay in India and his family – all of whom were Kenyan-born – were obliged to join him in India. Okello's office did nothing for his case, "Mahesh Uncle had been shamelessly let down by the man whom he had served" (269). He was in a state of confusion. He was in an in-between land; Delhi, once part of his ancestral country, was now part of a new country, is ancestral home has been subsumed into the Muslim-identifying Pakistan, and Kenya, which he had strove to make his new home, would no longer accept him. However, he had to survive and come to terms with his ambivalence.

It was Vikram who arranged his uncle's return to Kenya, thanks to his relations with a man in the government which Mahesh was against. Vikram wrote a letter to Mzee explaining his family's alliance to the land, their loyal service and personally delivered the letter to the Old Man. Kenyatta was furious at the letter: "Is this how you speak to a father … You Indians are brought up well, but a letter is not the way" (287), but nevertheless, granted Vikram's wishes, "Go. Tell your uncle to get on the plane and not do foolish things here in Kenya. Look what his friend Double-O has done to our Kenya" (287).

Mahesh Uncle arrived Kenya with his family; "As soon as he came off the steps from the airplane … he threw three kisses into the air, in three directions, and went down on his knees and kissed the ground" (291). No body from Okello's office called or welcomed him during his three weeks stay. They had no use of him anymore.

However, this was not a permanent return as Mahesh was not sure if his children could adjust to another move; they had already become Indians. It was not

only the children who were alienated to life in Kenya. In the five years that Mahesh Uncle was away the country had also changed greatly, and finally, he decided that Kenya was no more a home, not for him nor for his family, and returned to India.

For someone who had served his country faithfully, this was a harsh fate. The reality of the situation was that Asian Africans were still considered outsiders, 'the other' for this country. As Vikram's boss, Paul Nderi, unsympathetically comments on Mahesh Uncle's return to India "you people have your feet planted in both countries, and when one place gets too hot for you, you flee to the other" (292). Vikram's response is indignant:

> Wasn't my uncle denied entry to Kenya even when his wife's family had been in the country eighty years, and didn't he plead for years for a permit? It's rather that "we people," as you call us, don't have a place anywhere, not even where we call home. (292)

Here Vassanji dramatically encapsulates the effects of displacement, and powerfully underscores it by making it one of the few moments in the novel when Vikram's anger gets the better of him.

3.2.3. The In-between World of Njoroge

The character Njoroge serves to illustrate various aspects of post-colonial theory. Like the protagonist, Njoroge also lives in an in-between world, natively African, yet still displaced. His entrance to the novel is couched in terms of place:

> I came upon an African boy sitting in our backyard on a stone, shooting pebbles. It was Njoroge.
> Ay, I said, don't you know this is our house?
> He looked up, then quietly took a few steps and stood in the no man's land between our area and the neighbour's in the next building, and watched me. (45)

Unsure of himself, even in his homeland, Njoroge retreats to a “no man’s land”. Here Vassanji has highlighted some of the principal controlling apparatuses of colonialism, the rule of ‘divide and conquer’, the process of inscribing new territorial boundaries on the land. A native African boy, coming from the lowest status level of society, feels he must no encroach upon the land of an Indian boy, even though that Indian boy is not himself from the upper level of the societal structure, but also under the control of the colonisers and subject to the same type of territorial strictures.

However, the system of divide and rule is not without its laxities. Vikram’s mother was always kind and warm to Njoroge. She felt a certain sense of kinship with him because they both had lost their mother when they were very young. Thus, Njoroge is welcomed into the Lall home and become fast friends with Vikram and Deepa, and thus the cultural boundaries set up by the colonisers are weakened and subverted, at least on this very local scale. However, as the novel progresses it becomes obvious that the freedoms of childhood do not translate into adulthood. This is brought out via the romantic relationship that develops between Njoroge and Deepa as young adults.

At first, their relationship seems possible to both of them. However, Njoroge becomes anxious about the future of the two. He was not only concerned about the reactions of Indian community but also his society which would not be willing to accept an Indian bride for their promising bright young fellow.

> Doubts and fears assailed him like hostile spirits as he lay awake in his bed at night: how would he convince her family to relent, permit him to marry their daughter; if they didn’t, would he have the strength to defy them, whom he loved and respected? It was not going to be easy at all. And later still, how would his African friends treat her, when they could still recall bitterly the past racism of her people? How would her own people treat her … (193)

He could have been easily called a coward compared to Deepa. Once he wrote her about his concerns,

> [W]e should call it off. I know your Indians too well, they will never allow their daughter to marry an African. It's no good, my Deepa, don't you see? I've become an African terrorist for your parents, who once loved me so much. I sometimes wonder how it is even possible that we've come this far, from our respective ends, that we are able even to talk so intimately, share so many thoughts. The most wonderful thing about us is that we've learned, we've discovered a new terrain in human relationship, a new trait of the heart that proclaims that we can get as close to another human as to become one in body and spirit – no matter how different the details of our birth! Do you see this? (193)

The courageous Njoroge of the new Africa was afraid to handle the situation. He was caught in-between his love for Deepa and the love and sense of duty to his people. Ironically, in a new country where everyone was declaiming the equality of races, the union of an Asian girl with an African was not acceptable. That dilemma was the cause of ambivalence in his soul and so in his life.

The ambivalence of Njoroge's national identity with his personal identity carries him to a dead end. When Deepa suggests running away from Kenya, he refused the idea fiercely: "This is a historical moment for Kenya, for East Africa … It's a time for Africa finally to become great in the world! … I have to be here, you have to be here, to witness that greatness; to make it *possible* … I have a role to play in that future…" (194). Njoroge decides, unlike Deepa, that if he has to make a choice his national identity would forgo his personal identity.

Vassanji, of course, does not make his characters simplistic representations of post-colonial theories. Instead, the break up of the relationship is connected in many ways to the complex melting pot of cultures that exist in the world of the colonised and the imported diasporic communities under colonial control. It was Njoroge who

finished the relationship, but not simply due to his notion of his important place in the incipient nation-building enterprise at hand. Njoroge claimed that the Kikuyu leader he consulted about their affair did not give permission for this marriage, that it was something that could be countenanced in his African society. There was nothing Deepa could do, yet she offered to talk to the 'Mundumugo' herself. She did not know that it was actually her mother who was not giving permission to this marriage. Njoroge was actually caught in-between once again, this time between Mother Lall and Deepa. Njoroge could not watch Mother Lall suffer – she was more like a mother to him than anyone else in this world. He did not want to hurt her even though that meant hurting Deepa.

Njoroge later views his actions as cowardice: "I couldn't take the pressure, it was just too much for me … all the secrecy and going against the wishes of your family, and … and the thought of later, people staring at you … and raising half-breeds … I just chickened out" (220). Vikram could not help thinking how easily Njoroge had given up. Later, he got married with a Kikuyu girl, a daughter of his boss, Cabinet Minister.

Njoroge's entry into politics also demonstrates the machinations of the corruption of power, and what happens when the colonial power structures are grafted onto a new nation state. Vassanji illuminates the disjunction between the rhetoric and the reality. Njoroge becomes a rising government bureaucrat specialising on Kenya's infamous land question. However, little goes the way for Njoroge expected in the following days and years. "His father-in-law, after a falling out with the ruling party, had been denied a seat in the last elections and was now a plain businessman minus the privileges of office." (259) Njoroge, once the devoted

admirer of Kenyatta left his job at the ministry and became an assistant to the radical politician and member of parliament J. M. Kariuki. He also became an admirer of Okello Okello. He realised that the freedom movement and the Mau Mau had been betrayed: “ours had become a country of ten millionaires and ten million paupers” (259). J. M. did not hesitate to proclaim loudly in public that “those who had collaborated with the colonial police were now in all the high posts and had taken for themselves the best land and opportunities” (259). Njoroge had to face the realities of the new world but they were too hard for Njoroge accept. He had dreams for his country; they were going to make it a free democratic country.

Jomo Kenyatta, had been ‘the god and demon’ of Vikram’s childhood and child Njoroge’s ‘Moses’. Things had reversed now, and Kenyatta was Vikram’s father but Njoroge’s devil. Njoroge warned his friend when he heard that Vikram had met with the President: “you need along spoon if you sup with the devil” (279). When Vikram reminded Njoroge how he worshipped him once, he confessed that he does not know what to believe any longer: “The world’s too much beyond our control; we thought we could make a difference to it, we could make Kenya great – and it’s all slipped away, the ideals and the hope … Look what’s happening outside – GSU clubbing down students, one of our best writers detained like a criminal” (279).

The roles had reversed; the once proud African who taught his Asian friend much about the land they live and its black people was now the naïve one. In researching the personal wealth of all the higher-ups in the government, Njoroge learnt nasty things the people he had once trusted, more than he could have dreamt about in his worst nightmares. His political activism inevitably bought about his demise. In desperation, Njoroge finally returns to his one true love, Deepa. With one

last hope Njoroge pleaded with Deepa to run away from the country, to escape. Once again there is a reversal of roles:

> He had been the calm voice of reason when she had wanted to run away from home; now it was she who had to talk sense, while he, all his dreams shred to bits, desperately begged her to leave with him. The circumstances were completely different now, both were married, with families. (324)

A month later it seemed as if the political turmoil in the country abated, Njoroge felt himself safe and he was going to give a lecture, "Celebrating J. M. Kariuki – The Promise Unfulfilled: J.M.'s Vision for Kenya" (326) organised by the University Student's Union. He was on one of his now regular visits to Deepa's pharmacy; the shop assistants left and they were alone when the two gunmen entered and shot Njoroge. He died on Deepa's lap: "In that scene he was finally hers" (327).

Njoroge's death did not cause much stir in the public, "he had not been a people's man, though he could well have become one" (327).

Here Vassanji reveals hope turned to dust. Like Vikram Lall, Njoroge is also caught up in the power play of colonialism, rebellion, decolonisation and attendant political corruption. His utopian dreams of a new nation that wholly rejects the deletes the oppression and power imbalances of the outgoing colonialists are never realised.

CONCLUSION

In *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* M.G. Vassanji explores the form and workings of ambivalent identities during the time between colonialism and post-colonialism. The novel, written in 2003, tells the story of the decolonisation of Kenya between the 1950s and 1980s from the perspective of an Asian African voice – Vikram Lall, the protagonist. Vassanji, while drawing on a common stereotype of an Indian in an African colony, destroys the notion of stereotyping by highlighting the nature of his ambivalent identity. Vikram is an in-between character due to his racial and colonial heritage and the largely dichotomous society he simultaneously lives in and lives outside of. He is a colonised subject in the polarised world of colonialism, that is, from the perspective of the White settlers, he is part of the colonised, but from the perspective of the Africans, he is a part of the oppressors; thus, Lall ends up being "the other" in all situations. In addition, his in-betweenness is deepened by the ambiguous atmosphere that is an inevitable outcome of the decolonisation process.

Further than this, the reason for his ambivalent identity/character is not simply a matter of being caught between the colonisers and the colonised, but it also a result of his sense of homelessness, brought about by being part of the Indian Diaspora in East Africa. As a result of not being accepted as part of either side, Vikram finds himself in an in-between space where there is no other choice but to be ambivalent. On the other hand, Vassanji does not depict these ambivalent or in-between spaces as infertile grounds. On the contrary, Vassanji focuses on the productivity of this 'Third Space' to argue that reconstruction of the identity may

only be possible through an awareness, understanding, and acceptance of ambivalence. As Bhabha mentions, “by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (56). As the novel progresses, Vikram’s narration of his life and time develops a new perspective for the image of “the other”.

As a postcolonial intellectual, Vassanji reflects the social, political, and historical realities of the decolonising Kenya through the mirror of fiction. He presents the in-between identities that are trapped in hollow concepts and polarised worlds and in doing so offers a vital criticism of the typical metaphor of Manichean duality.

As Memmi has expressed: “Like the colonized, the decolonized is not a saint; how could he be and continue to live through such an agitated period of history?” (xii). Understanding this vital point, Vassanji neither glorifies nor criticises these ambivalent characters, but instead shows how their desire for a pure identity or culture ends up in failure. By doing so, he claims that it is not possible to come to terms with one’s self without accepting differences/ambivalences and re-evaluating them as richness, pointing to the notion of hybridity as the only way to overcome all the diseased signs of colonialism.

Vassanji’s novel thus can be seen to reflect the concerns of postcolonial theorists. Albert Memmi, in his book *Decolonization and the Decolonized*, attempts to mirror the worlds that are constructed during the painful process of decolonisation, and notes that “More than a precautionary compassion is needed if we are to help decolonized peoples; we must acknowledge and speak the truth to them, because we feel they are worthy of hearing it” (xiv). He believes that only a true analysis can

create an opportunity for the ex-colonised to face their failures and raise an awareness of themselves:

> Finally, I remain convinced that the best way of correcting such failures is to make an accurate assessment of them, which is what I have tried to do. This seemed to me the best way of assisting those who were once colonized – and their inevitable partners as well. (xiv)

Whilst theoreticians like Memmi, Bhabha, Fanon, and many others discuss have created an academic discourse and critique of colonialism, decolonisation and post-colonialism, M.G. Vassanji has contributed to this field of human interest with his highly successful novel, thus bringing the same concerns to a wider audience in a format palatable both to the academic and the non-academic, offering the hope that together, theoreticians and novelists can act as architects of new social structures that can repair some of the damage waged by the imperialism of the past.

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